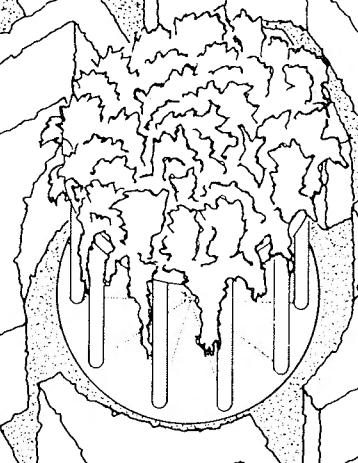
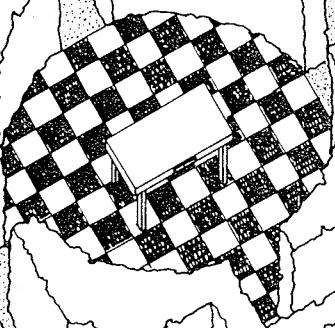


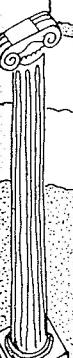
HERESIES

Volume 2 and Anthology



HERESIES II

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The idea of a HERESIES issue examining the relationships between women and architecture was an outgrowth of projects and research which we had been engaged in collectively since 1976. Initially the proposal for this issue met with some skepticism both from the HERESIES Collective and other feminists. The feminist analysis of built space has come later than comparable critical evaluations of, for example, employment, politics, health, and sex roles. This is no doubt related to the common belief that architecture is something only the wealthy can afford or that it is a neutral background which doesn't affect people's lives.

The notion of the Other, as understood by Simone de Beauvoir when she wrote about women as "defined and differentiated with reference to man," as "the incidental, the inessential," also applies to architecture. The history and practice of architecture have ignored, for all their lip service to humanism, the lives, needs, aspirations, work, and creativity of women. In this issue we refer to and expand on the humanist tradition of architecture through viewpoints, themes, and strategies that demonstrate how the connections between women's lives and their environment are to a large extent a consequence of political and economic actions, both in a repressive and a liberating sense. Without these concerns architecture, as a profession and as an art, will utterly fail to fulfill its role in creating appropriate settings for all human life. The range of articles and projects selected for this issue are intended to open a debate and to create links between feminism and architecture, both in theory and in practice.

*Women taking charge of their own spatial destiny* is a theme of several articles and projects. Wekerle, Adam/Aitcheson/Sprague, Lindquist, S. Francis, Weisman, Harris, Marks/Bishop, and Sutton all describe a present-day self-help and community development movement in which women are working to define and fulfill their special needs, long ignored by developers, planners, and designers. Similarly, articles by Wright, Gilman, Hayden, and Rock show that in the past women have on occasion attempted to create alternative spaces for themselves, outside the limited sphere of the single-family home.

*The powerlessness women feel in not being able to control their own environments* as well as their frustration at being relegated to the domestic sphere come out in articles by Pollock and P. Francis. In different ways Rubbo, Barkin, and Cranz document how women frequently have not been asked to participate in spatial decision-making processes directly affecting their lives. All these authors underscore the difficulties women face in changing both their roles and their environments. The interior of the house has been the only area over which women have had any spatial control. An appreciation of *women's creative responses to domestic confines* and the *identification of an ongoing woman's culture in the home* are themes taken up by Hess, Maglin, and Greenbaum.

Articles by Nevins, Balmori, Dietsch, and Boutelle focus on the work of women designers in the past and lead us to speculate about a *female approach to design and career*. Julia Morgan's architectural practice owed much to a network of women clients and women's organizations and can be seen as a consequence of the spirit of cooperation and enthusiasm among women which flourished during the Suffrage era. The work of Eileen Gray and Lilly Reich, European designers of the early modern movement, suggests a *concern for human comfort and multiplicity of use* which goes beyond the formal characteristics of the prevailing International Style.

Whether women design differently from their male counterparts seems to be a predictable question about women and architecture. While this HERESIES issue does not address this question extensively, certain articles and projects suggest that *women do bring different attitudes to the design process* (Rondanini, Kennedy, Birkby, Price, Connor/Dennis, Rutholtz/Sung, Tsien, McNeur, Morris, Torre).

Even the most superficial examination of how the built environment is organized—how many and what kinds of services are available in what neighborhoods, who owns and who rents, who has spacious or cramped living and working quarters and where—reveals that the size, character, location, and quality of space accorded to an individual or class reflect the values of a society. Change in spatial allocation is therefore inherent to change in power distribution. We believe that what is broadly termed "architecture" indeed has a particular significance for women. As architects, designers, educators, critics, and feminists, we assert that a political interest in the design and planning of dwellings, communities, public spaces, and cities should be a concern of all feminists.

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*The Editors*

OPEN MEETING  
Wednesday, May 6 at 8 p.m., A.I.R. Gallery,  
97 Wooster Street, New York City.

# Architecture and Social Change

Nunzia Rondanini

**A**s a movement uniting all women in a struggle against exploitation and discrimination, feminism includes the goals of attaining our own identity and of achieving a share of power. Yet, among ourselves, we may disagree on the meaning of both identity and power. I, for instance, do not see feminism as independent of class struggle, but rather as a stream that eventually flows into the larger movement toward a new social organization. This explains why, in dealing with the relationships between architecture and social change, I cannot identify an *exclusively* feminist dimension of the problem.

Architecture, like feminism, is also a much debated term. The role of the architect today is particularly uncertain and ambiguous. A coherent and solid foundation to contemporary practice necessitates a theoretical framework if questions raised by this practice are to be answered coherently. This rational foundation must be sought in history, in the works that were built or only planned, as they appear in their ultimate expression: form. History—whether man's or woman's—has never experienced interruptions. Historical events—and architecture—may change or develop, but they always originate in their precedents. Architecture is as old as people themselves. Can we now "invent" it, starting from fanciful images of tomorrow's world or from what we think a liberated feminine sensibility should be? We will not do anything different unless we do something better. And this implies a knowledge of what we will improve upon. It is only through history that we can learn about architecture. The fact that history has been written and built mostly by men is a reality we cannot wipe out in a single sweep.

The industrial and bourgeois revolutions in the 19th century brought to an end the dialogue between the prince and the architect that had traditionally been the generator of architecture. The unity of architectural theory and practice was thus dissolved, opening the way to diverse, conflicting interpretations.

Three such interpretations in particular are currently trying to assert their theoretical supremacy in competition with one another: *functionalism*, according to which the form of any architectural work

is the direct offspring of its function, i.e., the material requirements that it is meant to fulfill; the *heteronomous theories*, which derive form from the analyses and conclusions of social and behavioral sciences; and *formalism*, which maintains that architectural form comes into being through a unique and independent process.

## Functionalism

In every city there are certain buildings, streets, and squares that last beyond their time and stand out among other urban elements. We call them monuments. If form really derives unequivocally from function, as functionalists claim, and given that function relates to the needs of a specific age and society, monuments should have disappeared along with the generation that created them. Instead, they have survived, sometimes by serving a purpose different from that originally intended. Indeed, one of their most interesting characteristics is precisely that they have outlived the immediate needs for which they were constructed. Yet monuments continue to impose their presence on the city and influence its development. The city acquires its unique form through a continuous interaction between monuments, the plan, and the smaller urban fabric. Such form is of great importance because it conveys the architectural message of the city.

Surrounded by a wild tropical landscape, the Mayan ruins are an example of what form by itself can mean. Although little is known about Mayan civilization and the practical use of these spaces, they nevertheless provoke an overwhelming aesthetic experience. Their function has been forgotten, but their form is still alive and one can learn from it.

Together with the other arts, architecture is a cultural manifestation of society. Functionalism ignores this reality. While function may play a role in defining architectural form, the relationship between function and form is not deterministic.

## Heteronomous Theories

The heteronomous theories derive architectural form from the analyses and conclusions of sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and economics. While these disciplines unquestionably contrib-

bute to an understanding of architecture, especially of the city, they should not interfere with its actual making. It is not possible to travel backwards and deduce a more "human" or "just" architecture from the findings of social sciences. There is no need for such sciences to mediate between architecture and reality because architecture is already a direct expression of society. The central and the longitudinal church plans, for example, show two different ways in which society envisioned the relationships between people, priest, and God; these views are expressed in the very configuration of the plans.

Social sciences are not involved with the process of creating form; they only concern themselves with it *a posteriori*. Those who wish to influence social behavior directly through architecture imply that one can establish a static relationship between some hypothetically desirable way of life and a corresponding architectural form. As in functionalism, form is subordinated to specific external requirements which supposedly generate it. Since these change continuously, it is bound to an early obsolescence. Experience has shown that an architectural form, such as a square, which at a given time fostered social interaction, may easily fail to do so when revived for this purpose. Similarly, the architectural proposals of utopian socialism or of German rationalism between the wars were products of careful social studies. However, once executed, they often proved ineffectual as instruments of social advancement and even became tools of oppression—an example being the concept of *existenz minimum* as it was applied to workers' housing.

## Formalism

Formalism maintains that the real field of expression of architecture is form, which finds its origin and definition through its own particular process, as the fulfillment of independent cultural choices. In discussing this question, György Lukacs refers to the town wall, among the very first examples of architecture. While the primary function of the town wall was to keep the enemy out, the feeling of security it gave to town dwellers soon ceased to be an accidental consequence and became a necessary component of the structure. At a certain stage,

the town dwellers' perception of the wall was no longer connected to its objective capacity to repel assailants, but rather was directly linked to its height, width, and solidity, that is, to its *form*. The wall was more than a manifestation of physical needs. It had become an expression of self-awareness, an artistic creation.<sup>1</sup>

Through its aesthetic dimension architecture goes beyond the functional aspects that it has in common with other human sciences and becomes truly autonomous. Form is at once the limit and liberation of architecture. Through form architecture can rise above the immediate conditions that produce it and can express values which survive for the future: the Parthenon or the Florentine Renaissance palace are as meaningful today as when they were first conceived.

In the final analysis the autonomy of architecture poses a value choice for the architect. The issue is not whether architecture is autonomous, but rather whether it ought to be so, whether it is an art and a necessary element for the complete satisfaction of our needs, and whether it should continue to exist as a discipline which "gives form" to the aspirations and feelings of humanity.

Through form, architecture has been a witness of human history. Architectural testimonies, placed next to each other in time (history) and space (the built environment), can be described and compared, studied and evaluated. The autonomy of architecture also consists of the possibility of identifying "from within" the general principles and techniques that apply to it.

In accepting architecture as an autonomous discipline, one frees it from the enslavement of other disciplines and returns it to its unique and universal role. Although essential, this clarification is only a starting point. I would now like to raise a complementary issue: that of the social impact of architecture, for by shaping the space in which one moves and has experiences, architecture is the very landscape of human life. Unlike other forms of art, architecture is not just aimed at an audience; it is also inhabited and used by people. It is thus potentially a social art of the highest order.

My defense of an autonomous architecture may seem to exclude any direct participation of architecture in social life. Yet I believe that architecture should neither be indifferent to nor simply dependent on social events. Through its own particular way of expressing values, architecture can stimulate and influence social life without presuming that, in and of itself, it will promote social development. The social role of an autonomous architecture must be felt by each architect. This is what Ernesto Rogers had in mind when

he exhorted his students at the Milan Polytechnic Institute: "Do not ever forget that you are first of all persons, then citizens, and finally architects." First, persons: this emphasizes the primary importance of personality and its subtle mesh of character, feelings, and experiences; the history of one's soul. Second, citizens: this condition cannot be renounced; what is at issue is social awareness. As citizens, we form an opinion about our environment and pursue a certain ideal; in other words, we take a political stand. Thus every action acquires an ideological counterpart, becoming at the same time an assessment of present reality and a proposal for the future. At no time can scientific or artistic expressions be "objective" or indifferent because the individuals who bring them to life are social and political beings. Finally, architects: this role demands a confrontation with the specific principles and techniques of the discipline, as well as with its almost unlimited historical references. It is in the application of principles and in the choice of references that both personality and ideology are revealed. Thus, personality and ideology represent the major variables of an architect's practice; they precede the actual design of the work.

While we—as women—struggle to liberate our own creativity, our work unavoidably expresses a constrained identity, product of our oppression. This condition becomes a "personal" component of our art, but one that is actually collective. I do not think that it is possible to derive an exclusively female architectural style from autobiographical references; yet certain similarities might be observed in projects designed by women. These similarities, however, do not mean that women have a different architectural sensibility but that we have a common history of oppression. As with other cultural expressions such as law and religion, the uses to which architecture is usually put reflect and preserve the capitalist and patriarchal orientations of our society. We must therefore seek an alternative to those conditions which bear a major responsibility for the exploitation and alienation of all people. Without avoiding the issue of a necessary commitment to political struggle, I—as a socialist-feminist architect—propose the inclusion of these alternatives in the professional agenda of women architects. In order to do this realistically, that is, without yielding to the inconsequential seduction of sociopolitical utopias, one must examine the limits of architecture in relation to the broader environment.

If we accept the assumption that economic relations are the most dominant aspect of society, it follows that architecture—although autonomous within its own disciplinary realm—is also dependent on them. What is important here is to determine the precise *extent* of this dependency. Some believe that art and therefore architecture are ultimately subordinate to class and economic conditions. Thus, art cannot contribute directly to class struggle—it's only progressive role is defined as that of unmasking and revealing the true nature of negative social values such as competition, profit, and sexual and racial discrimination. Disciplinary research is seen as irrelevant by those who regard change in the economic basis of society as the only means for revitalizing both architecture and society.

This position fails to realize that the relationship between the economic structure of society and its cultural superstructure is not completely subordinate but that there is a measure of interaction. Engels wrote:

*Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc. development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the cause and alone active, while everything else has only a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself.<sup>2</sup>*

According to this position, it is possible to envision social changes that are the result not only of those actions which directly affect the mode of production but of alternative ideas and values developed in the cultural realm. Historical change is not just accompanied but often prefigured by innovative cultural trends which anticipate and contribute to shaping social struggles.

The real expectations that architecture is supposed to meet are the same for everybody: comfort, security, and a place of self-identification. While the rich may indeed satisfy these needs, the poor cannot. Similarly, women can often only satisfy certain imposed needs that are not necessarily their own. Most architectural expressions—from the Egyptian pyramid to the neo-classical villa—reflect and indeed presuppose the existing power structure. Cultivating the arts has traditionally been a prerogative of the ruling class, which can develop its intellectual talents through its exemption from manual and reproductive labor. A cross-section of any contemporary city will show that the architectural environment of the wealthy is infinitely superior to that of the working class.

Yet the decay and segregation of large areas of the city are not the responsibility of architecture but of its political misuse.<sup>3</sup> There is indeed a big difference between the disciplinary dimension of architecture and its actual use. Architects do not have

much control over the latter. Only those in power can exercise it, often against the intended purpose of the planners. The only alternative to capitalist, racist, and sexist use of architecture would be one and the same social use by and for all people without any discrimination whatsoever. Although the realization of this goal will require a radical economic and political change, we must keep it in mind when designing.

It is by concentrating on the possibility of development within the discipline that architecture may contribute to social progress. Through a knowledge of the elements and types that have recurred historically in architecture, it is possible to identify those that have been, at any given time, most appropriate and responsive to basic human needs. They are in a sense common denominators which go beyond historical and technical circumstances. By redefining these types in the context of present conditions, each of our solutions can build on previous ones and become a source for the future, suggesting new ways for building and living.

It is therefore precisely in its autonomous dimension—the only one that architects can really master—that a project can break away from the dominant ideas. Progressiveness in architecture depends on the discipline's ability to develop within itself. Here progressiveness is not necessarily the outcome of a political determination, but it does presuppose a clear understanding of reality and thus a precise identification of the specific boundaries of architecture, its relationship to historical continuity and to contemporary problems. In 1934, while working in the USSR, where he had been called to contribute to the definition of a "Soviet" architecture, André Lurçat wrote:

*A modern architect must find in every epoch, in every great architectural work, be it Greek or Chinese, Roman or Aztec, the general laws of architecture. These laws are rightly the structure and the very essence of our art, the only tradition that we can know and express authentically, while relating to our times of socialist construction.<sup>4</sup>*

I believe this is true also with regard to the "female" characteristics of architecture. One cannot preconceive a feminist architecture from the ideal of an egalitarian society. For architecture exists only as the expression of an actually established social order, and we should not assume that our imagination is free until our condition is also free. Even when the struggle to achieve true equality is over—where will we begin if not from the historical heritage of architecture?

Yet by concentrating exclusively on the autonomy of architecture or on its

social role, one can easily lose sight of reality. Architects should not use autonomy as an excuse for not acknowledging the oppressive conditions of the social environment in their work. To restrict the meaning of formalism to art for art's sake is not only reactionary; it can also be a purposeless quest for perfection or originality which degrades form into a mere instrumentality. But those who would wish to see architecture stand in the forefront of social struggles would miss altogether the subtle and indirect—indeed subversive—influence that architecture can have on society.

I have given paramount importance to the study of history in outlining the positive relationships between architecture's autonomy and a socially responsible and progressive practice. In closing I want to emphasize even more that this study should be made collectively. For only through a coordinated, patient sum of ideas and notions, through a modest and constant verification and comparison, can we acquire that deeper, responsive knowledge of our art and a progressive release of individual creativity. This collective effort is very difficult indeed within the structure of capitalist and patriarchal organizations, where any values, from human dignity to the meaning of architecture are eventually lost. We should not accept individualism and its misery, competition and its violence, elitism and its deeply conservative nature, because while we may get a few women closer to the summit of power, we may achieve no difference in the substance and quality of life. From our experience of exclusion from the centers of culture and power, we should have learned about their unjust and alienating structure. We should struggle not so much to be accepted by them but to change them.

1. In the words of Lewis Mumford: "The city is a fact in nature, like a cave, a run of mackerel or an ant-heap. But it is also a conscious work of art. . . . Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind. For space, no less than time, is artfully reorganized in cities: in boundary lines and silhouettes, in the fixing of horizontal planes and vertical peaks, in utilizing or denying the natural site, the city records the attitude of a culture and an epoch to the fundamental facts of its existence. The dome and the spire, the open avenue and the closed court, tell the story, not merely of different physical accommodations, but of essential different conceptions of man's destiny" (*Culture of Cities* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938], p. 5).
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Correspondence 1846-1895*, ed. and trans. Dona Torr (London: Laurence, 1934), p. 515.
3. The fact that the defeat embodied in the slums is social and political becomes evi-

dent every time that city administrators undertake urban renewal or similar rehabilitative efforts. While trying to mitigate the housing problem, in practice they achieve nothing but the displacement in time or space of a phenomenon which will appear again. This is because these "technical" interventions, as sophisticated as they may become with the support of parallel initiatives in such areas as welfare and education, ignore the fact that the question is neither architectural, educational, etc., nor the mere sum of all these: slums are just one of those diseases that paradoxically are necessary to the well-being of capitalism. In the same way, the confinement of the housewife to her kitchen, or her isolation in the suburbs where she is prevented from any public or cultural life, is the consequence of a sexist division of labor and should not be blamed on architecture.

4. André Lurçat, "Neoclassicism or Constructivism," *Architecture in USSR* (Moscow, July 1934). Quoted by Bruno Cassetti, "André Lurçat in URSS," *Socialismo, Città, Architettura URSS 1917-1937* (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1976), p. 206.

Nunzia Rondanini is an Italian architect presently working in New York City. She recently spent a year in Nicaragua working for the Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements on the design of a large housing complex in Managua.

# Women's Environmental Rights: A Manifesto

Leslie Kanes Weisman

## Be it acknowledged

The man-made environments which surround us reinforce conventional patriarchal definitions of women's role in society and spatially imprint those sexist messages on our daughters and sons. They have conditioned us to an environmental myopia which limits our self-concepts... which limits our visions and choices for ways of living and working... which limits us by not providing the environments we need to support our autonomy or by barring our access to them. It is time to open our eyes and see the political nature of this environmental oppression!

## Architecture as icon

The built environment is a cultural artifact. It is shaped by human intention and intervention, a living archaeology through which we can extract the priorities and beliefs of the decision-makers in our society. Both the process through which we build and the forms themselves embody cultural values and imply standards of behavior which affect us all.

From the corporate towers of the wizards of industry to the Emerald City of the Wizard of Oz, men have created the built environment in their own self-image. The 20th-century urban skyscraper, a pinnacle of patriarchal symbology, is rooted in the masculine mystique of the big, the erect, the forceful—the full balloon of the inflated masculine ego. Skyscrapers in our cities compete for individual recognition and domination while impoverishing human identity and the quality of life.

The home, the place to which women have been intimately connected, is as revered an architectural icon as the skyscraper. From early childhood women have been taught to assume the role of "homemaker," "housekeeper," and "housewife." The home, long considered women's special domain, reinforces sex-role stereotypes and subtly perpetuates traditional views of family. From the master bedroom to the head of the table, the "man of the house/breadwinner" is afforded places of authority, privacy (his own study), and leisure (a hobby shop, a special lounge chair). A homemaker has no inviolable space of her own. She is attached to spaces of service. She is a hostess in the living room, a cook in the kitchen, a mother in the children's room, a lover in the bedroom, a chauffeur in the garage. The house is a spatial and temporal metaphor for conventional role playing.

The acceptance and expression of these traditional cultural roles and attitudes still persist in the design, if not the use, of almost all domestic architecture. In being exclusively identified with the home, women are associated with traits of nurturance, cooperation, subjectivity, emotionalism, and fantasy. While "man's world"—the public world of events and "meaningful" work—is associated with objectivity, impersonalization, competition, and rationality.

This fragmentation, this segregation of the public and private spheres according to sex roles reinforces an emotionally monolithic stereotype of women and men. It excludes each sex from contact and therefore a fuller understanding of each other. It limits each from learning a variety of skills and reflects on our concepts of self and other. I believe one of the most important responsibilities of architectural feminism is to heal this schizophrenic spatial schism—to find a new architectural language in which the "words," "grammar," and "syntax" synthesize work and play, intellect and feeling, action and compassion.

## Environment as barrier

Women's lives are profoundly affected by the design and use of public spaces and buildings, transportation systems, neighborhoods, and housing. Discriminatory laws, governmental regulations, cultural attitudes, informal practices, and lack of awareness by professionals have created conditions which reflect and reinforce women's second-class status.

Women are perceived as having very little to do with public space. In public buildings and spaces both physical and cultural barriers exclude women with children. A woman with a child in a stroller, trying to get through a revolving door or a subway turnstile, is a "handicapped" person. Public places rarely provide space where infants can be breast-fed or have their diapers changed—the implication being that mothers and children should be at home where they belong.

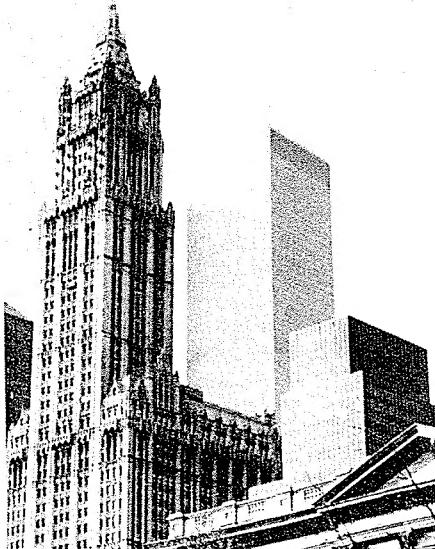


Photo by Leslie Kanes Weisman

Architect Louis Sullivan, often referred to as the "Father of the Skyscraper," described a building by his colleague Henry Hobson Richardson in this way:

*Here is a man for you to look at, a virile force, an entire male. It stands in physical fact, a monument to trade, to the organized commercial spirit, to the power and progress of the age, to the strength and resource of individuality and force of character. Therefore I have called it, in a world of barren pettiness, a male, for it sings the song of procreative power, as others have squealed of miscegenation [Kindergarten Chats, 1901].*

Public transportation is used by those with the least access to automobiles, namely the young, the aged, minorities, and low-income workers. While men also fall into these categories, almost twice as many women as men rely on public transportation to get to their jobs in the 12 largest metropolitan areas of the country. The location of industries and household work in the suburbs, where there is little, if any, public transportation, severely influences job possibilities for both urban low-income female heads of households and suburban women without access to cars.

Women of all socioeconomic classes have been victims of extreme discrimination in the rental and purchase of housing and in obtaining mortgage financing and insurance. Section 8, a federally subsidized housing program, disqualifies single persons who are not elderly or disabled as well as people of the same or opposite sex who live together but are not related by blood or marriage. Standards of this type deny equal access to much-needed low-cost housing for the burgeoning numbers of widows and displaced homemakers, many of whom are likely to have limited or low incomes. It also blatantly discriminates according to sexual preference and marital status. Yet in the past 12 years, households of "primary individuals" (those who live with persons unrelated to them) have grown four times as fast as households of nuclear families. In 1973, 76% of women over the age of 65 who were heads of households lived alone. The increased longevity of women, combined with undeniable changes in family structure, requires the availability of a wide range of housing types, locations, and prices which respect the diversity of the aging population and acknowledge varying levels of dependence.

A meaningful environment is necessary and essential to a meaningful existence. Women must demand public buildings and spaces, transportation, and housing, which support our lifestyles and incomes and respond to the realities of our lives, not the cultural fantasies about them.



Photo by Bettye Lane

On New Year's Eve 1971, 75 women took over an abandoned building on Fifth Street owned by the City of New York. They issued the following statement on January 29:

*Because we want to develop our own culture,  
Because we want to overcome stereotypes,  
Because we refuse to have "equal rights" in  
a corrupt society,  
Because we want to survive, grow, be  
ourselves...*

*We took over a building to put into action  
with women those things essential to women  
—health care, child care, food conspiracy,  
clothing and book exchange, gimme  
women's shelter, a lesbian rights center,  
interarts center, feminist school, drug  
rehabilitation.*

*We know the city does not provide for us.  
Now we know the city will not allow us to  
provide for ourselves.*

*For this reason we were busted.  
We were busted because we are women  
acting independently of men,  
independently of the system...  
In other words, we are women being  
revolutionary.*

#### Space as power

The appropriation and use of space are political acts. The kinds of spaces we have, don't have, or are denied access to can empower us or render us powerless. Spaces can enhance or restrict, nurture or impoverish. We must demand the right to architectural settings which will support the essential needs of all women.

The types of spaces demanded by the women involved in the Fifth Street takeover poignantly illustrate those places lacking in our lives. Day-care centers, displaced homemakers' facilities, and women's resource centers are vitally necessary if we are to eliminate existing and potential barriers to employment for all women. Battered women's shelters are essential if we are to provide women and their children with a safe refuge from their abusers and a place to rethink their lives, futures, and the welfare of their children. Emergency housing is needed for women runaways and victims of rape. Halfway houses ought to exist for prostitutes, alcoholics, addicts, and prisoners. Shelters for shopping bag ladies are needed as well. We need decentralized and convenient health care facilities for women. We need to build safe and available abortion clinics. Midwife-run birth centers are crucial if we are to have control over our own bodies and restore our "birth right." These places and spaces represent new architectural settings which reflect both radical changes in our society as well as glaring evidence of women's oppression and disenfranchisement.

#### **What can we do about it?**

Women constitute over 50% of the users of our environments, yet we have had a negligible influence on the architectural forms our environments express. Where legislation and funding connected with new spaces for women do exist, it is primarily the result of activism by women, women's movement organizations, and the work of those few but increasing feminists who are in elected or appointed political office. If the future vision for the built and planned environment is to be one in which the totality of women's needs is environmentally supported, then each woman must become her own architect, that is, she must become aware of her ability to exercise environmental judgment and make decisions about the nature of the spaces in which she lives and works. Women must act consciously and politically. We must ask ourselves who will benefit and who will lose in decisions being made about our neighborhoods, homes, and workplaces, and endorse those proposals that make life easier for us and for those groups who have the least.

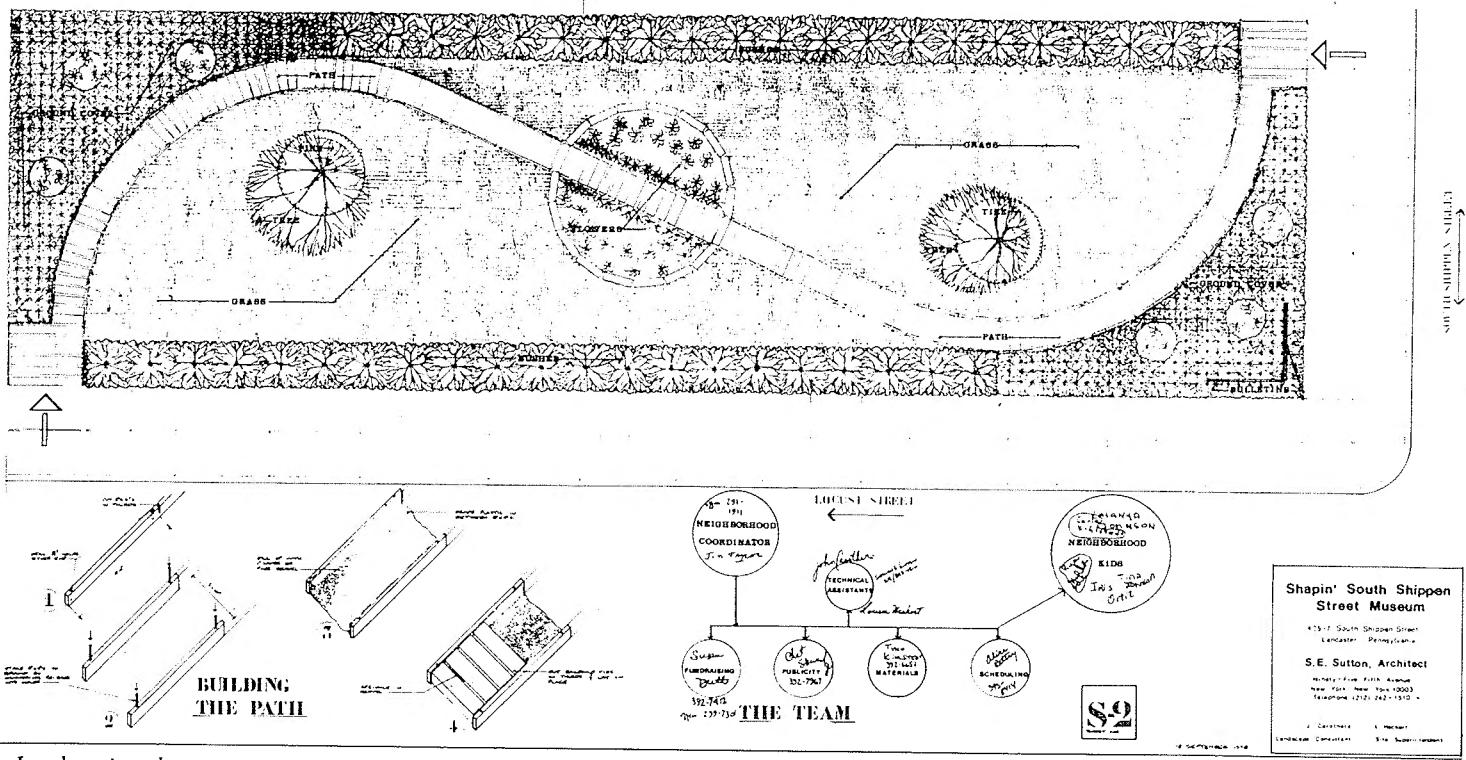
#### **Be it affirmed**

The built environment is largely the creation of white, masculine subjectivity. It is neither value-free nor inclusively human. Feminism implies that we fully recognize this environmental inadequacy and proceed to think and act out of that recognition.

One of the most important tasks of the women's movement is to make visible the full meaning of our experiences and to reinterpret and restructure the built environment in those terms. We will not create fully supportive, life-enhancing environments until our society values those aspects of human experience that have been devalued through the oppression of women, and we must work with each other to achieve this.

These are feminist concerns which have critical dimensions that are both societal and spatial. They will require feminist activism as well as architectural expertise to insure a solution.

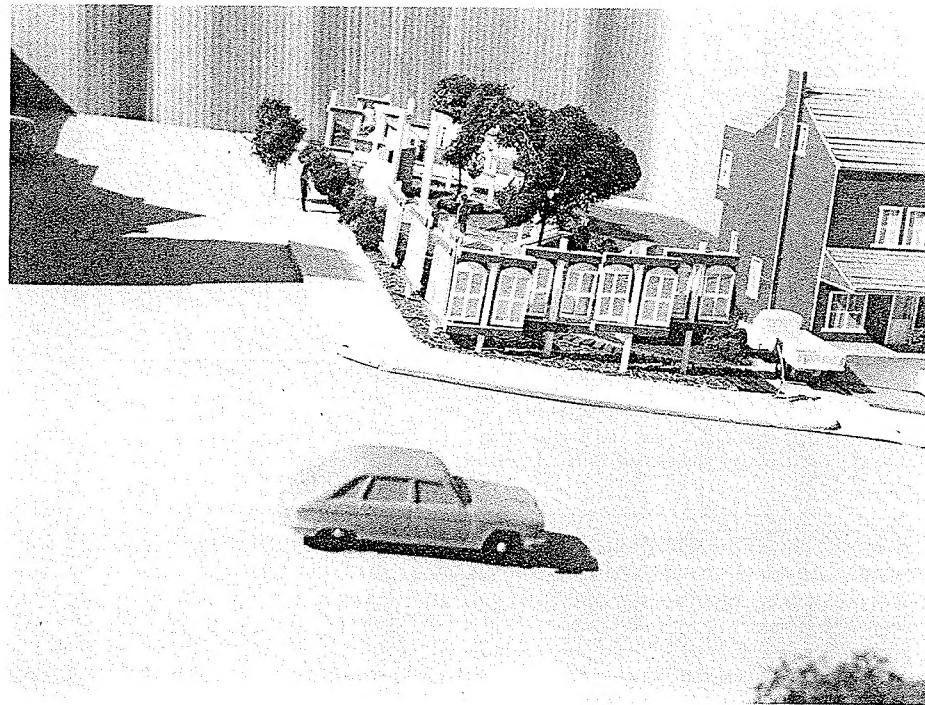
*Leslie Kanes Weisman, Professor of Architecture and Environmental Design at New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark and a co-founder of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture, is currently writing a book about women, architecture, and society.*



Landscaping plan.

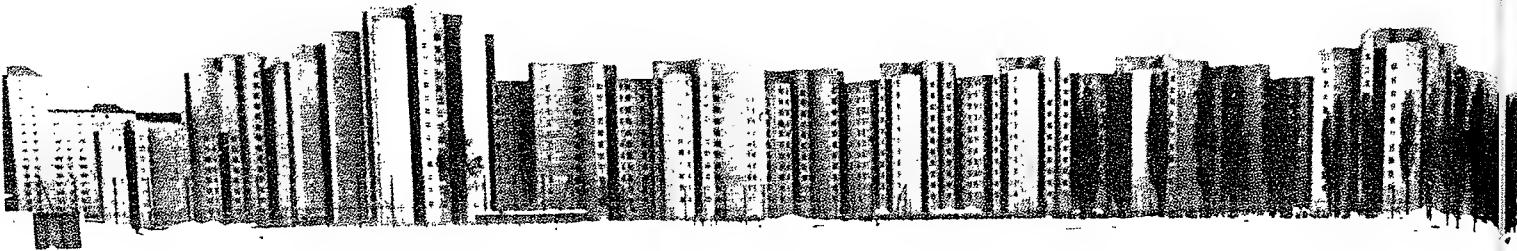
# Street Museum

## Sharon Sutton



Sharon Sutton is an architect and PhD candidate in environmental psychology at CUNY Graduate Center.

Designed during her tenure as Visiting Professor at Franklin and Marshall College, Sharon Sutton's Street Museum tries to involve the resources and participation of a community—in this case the Shippen-Locust neighborhood in Lancaster, Pa. The site was a vacant lot, "loaned" to the community by a church. Sutton canvassed the neighborhood and soon discovered the anger and anxiety that are lodged in decaying places; the blame was mostly placed on the local youth, who took to vandalizing as a means of expressing their own frustration and alienation. The lack of a place for children to play was a common complaint. In response Sutton proposed a park with a curving path connecting two streets, gently inviting movement into the inside—toward a more quiet, ordered realm than that of the mean sidewalks. Discarded and recyclable materials, flowers transplanted from a neighbor's garden, and doors and windows from derelict buildings (anchored with stakes) were the building elements. The park's design—its *intention*—promotes the feeling that it is possible to make something out of nothing and that meaning and place—the very qualities that unify people and their environments—can be found even in the battered physical remains of a neighborhood. The children's murals on the windows and doors depict their view of the neighborhood; they are the beginning of a transformation. Projects like this one hold out *hope*. Their duration is in the end less important than the process that allows the people to organize, work together, and succeed, beyond skepticism and doubt. (S.T.)



# “Where Do You Live?”

## Women in the Landscape of Poverty

**L**iving without men or money, low-income women have been prime targets of scorn and mistrust. Rejecting or failing to achieve everything society has taught them to want, single mothers have been viewed as women with nothing to lose, and nobody to keep them in line. As such, they pose a certain danger to the established order. Their isolation and segregation in housing projects are ways of confining that threat, and exiling them for the crime of living without men.

These shoddy, demoralizing environments, designed and built specifically to contain poor people, are called “government subsidized housing.” Although such projects are not new or uniquely American, they have proliferated in cities across the country in the past 20 years. The development of low-income housing has been part of the illusion of progress we’ve seen since World War II, during which time increased lip-service has been paid to inequalities based on race, sex, and class. However, despite the rhetoric and the numerous programs designed to alleviate the inequalities, 1978 found more women and Blacks living below the poverty level than those counted in 1968.

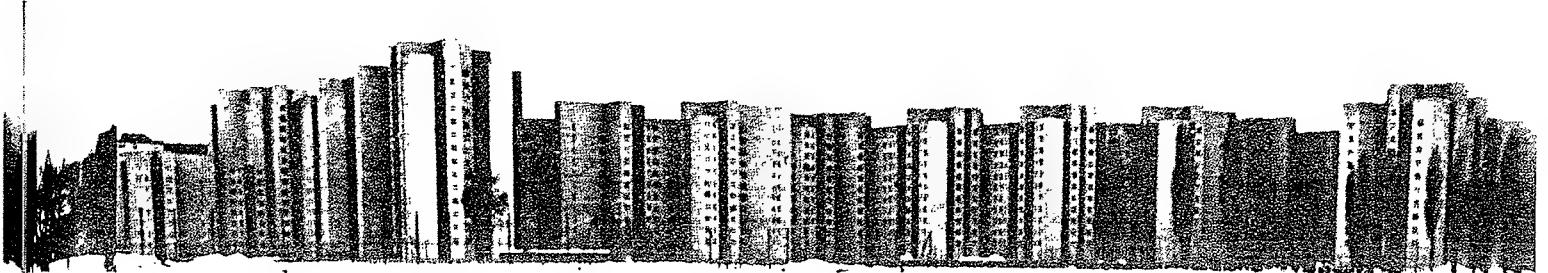
The housing projects themselves did much to sustain this illusion of progress. Freshly painted, well-lit, and often quite spacious, the new developments that were a large part of urban renewal campaigns undertaken in the sixties were quickly filled with tenants while others signed waiting lists hoping to get in. However, these schemes like many other programs reinforced the psychological oppression of poverty. Their standardized building types easily identified them as “projects” and their bad reputations began to flourish almost before the tenants moved in.

Poor families moving into the developments are given a further class branding, as if anyone who is poor in America is likely to forget it. A low-income woman is not only reminded of her status by the things she lacks, but she must identify herself by it, often several times a day. She must identify herself as poor when she goes into the supermarket and uses her food stamps, when she takes her children to the doctor with a Medicaid card, and, if she lives in low-income housing, whenever she gives her address. Her children, as well, must be identified as poor as soon as they enter the first grade and learn to answer that most basic question, “Where do you live?”

Ostracism and identification are only two of the ways the projects psychologically oppress their inhabitants. Physically, the projects are not designed to accommodate privacy or comfort to any appreciable degree. In most projects the ordinary sounds of daily living are audible through the walls, and one family’s quarrels or celebrations intrude disruptively on the lives of neighbors. Thus, the police are called more often than in the suburbs, or in apartment complexes with better acoustic design, adding to the notion that the project is a “bad neighborhood.”

Other signs indicating that subsidized housing is designed to contain a criminal or “delinquent” element include the excess of lighting in parking and play areas. In the apartment where I live it is never dark (even with the shades drawn and heavy curtains on the windows) because the many bright globes of light that stud the project create an unnatural daylight that penetrates into all the apartments. Though there have been no murders or rapes, and few burglaries in the five years I’ve lived here, and I consider it to be a relatively safe neighborhood, it was obviously designed in anticipation of the crimes the planners expected the low-income community to commit. I am reminded of the writer who was shocked to find a similar absence of night in the Soweto ghetto, and compared its psychological abuse to Nazi concentration camps, where bright lights also simulated an eternal daylight.

But perhaps the most significant psychological factor of life in the projects is that the poor, who have little control over many aspects of their lives as it is, suffer a further loss of control of their children to this environment. As soon as the children leave their apartments, they are part of the neighborhood, a world that has its own laws and hierarchies



## Pat Therese Francis

(often based on physical strength and "toughness"). It is one in which parents/mothers have little power. Since the children are crowded into small play areas, there is little opportunity to choose playmates for one's children, or to keep them from influences or knowledge they are not yet prepared for. Unlike children in most affluent neighborhoods, poor children generally have little opportunity to leave their projects at all, due to the same economic conditions that put them there in the first place.

Often the close proximity of buildings to the play areas discourages active games such as baseball, which might cause windows to be broken. In fact, in one project I visited in Boston recently, ball playing of any kind was expressly prohibited, and signs stating that were posted on every building. What is most disturbing about this is not that children are denied the space and opportunity for the active play they need, but that they are being subtly punished for their parents' low-income status, and taught to view their own natural exuberance and energy as a negative force by the design of the buildings and layout of the grounds.

Constructed as cheaply and quickly as possible, the projects are quite simply not built to last. This, too, adversely affects the morale of the inhabitants, who find that the poor-quality fixtures need replacing sooner than they should, usually at the tenant's expense. I am reminded of the children's story "The Three Little Pigs," in which the pig in the brick house has an evident psychological advantage over the one in the straw house. Likewise, human inhabitants of a clearly impermanent environment must be reminded daily of their particular vulnerabilities. Yet, when the projects show signs of wear, it is not the architects or builders who are called to task. It is the tenants who are blamed for failing to keep up the property, fueling theories that hold the poor responsible for their own misfortunes.

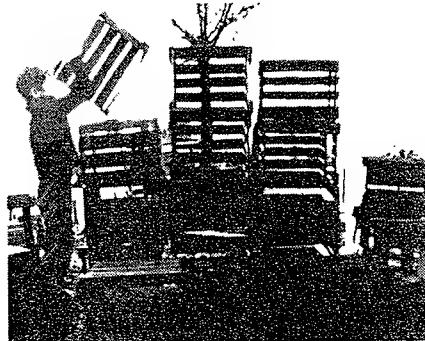
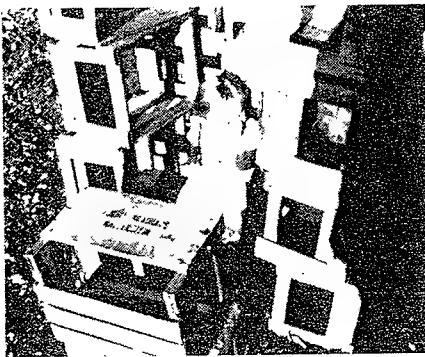
Women, of course, are not the only inhabitants of subsidized housing, though female heads of households frequently lease one half to two thirds of the apartments in a development. For them, the psychological impact of life in the project can be more devastating than it is for male residents. Since nearly all the women in projects are mothers, often without cars or the means to secure childcare, they do not have the freedom to leave the project for extended periods of time. They spend most of their hours inside their apartments or in the neighborhood, with few releases for pent-up frustration, and little opportunity to gain another perspective on their situation. Obviously, this can only exacerbate the sense of isolation and powerlessness that accompanies poverty. Without outside stimulation and extensive contact with women exploring other options, women in projects find their own lives and what they perceive as their choices increasingly narrowed.

In outlining the disadvantages inherent in subsidized housing, I do not mean to deny their advantage, which is real and needed economic help. However, there are ways to subsidize housing which are not stigmatizing and subtly punitive. Instead of being herded into projects, a low-income family can choose a reasonably priced apartment and have their rent subsidized in the same way it would be in the development. At this time this kind of help is very limited. Some families wait for years for their name to come up on a waiting list. In the meantime rules may be changed making them ineligible, the list may be scrapped, and the family then accepts their life in the project and does not seek an alternative.

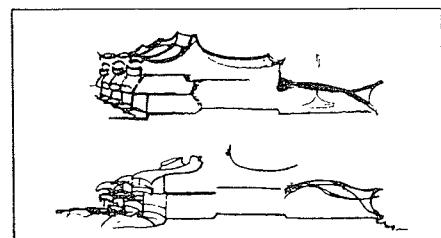
At this time there are only individual answers to the challenges of living in an environment built for poverty, and, as women, we have come to mistrust individual answers that make tokens of a few while effecting no real change. It is for us to remember that poverty is very much a feminist issue, not only because the majority of the poor are women, but also because many of the tactics used to repress the poor are also used on women, whatever their economic class. The weapons may be wielded differently, but they are of the same arsenal and can only be countered through the awareness of the "underclass," whether that term is defined by race, economic status, or sex.

*Pat Therese Francis and her children have lived in a low-income housing project for four years. In addition to writing fiction and poetry, she has done public relations work for the Poor Women's Task Force in Amherst, Mass.*

# Seven Hypotheses on Female and



The experiments of Erik H. Erikson reported in *Childhood and Society* demonstrated a significant difference between structures built by boys and by girls. The experiments involved 150 preadolescent children, who built about 450 scenarios out of building blocks for stories of their own invention. Boys usually constructed buildings, towers, and streets, with one of their favorite events being the destruction of those elements. Girls generally built interior settings and rooms as background for family life, with an emphasis on the entry to the space.



Merete Mattern, studies for "eco-houses," in which living and working are integrated. Houses can be placed side-by-side or stacked vertically.

In biology and psychology, in philosophy and art, we are used to distinguishing between male and female elements and accepting that one without the other is unthinkable. Principles of architecture, along with those of science and technology, have so far been considered neutral with respect to gender. Or architecture has been considered to be so much the domain of men that women appear as exotic intruders, who naturally have some difficulties in adjusting. The fact that architecture was once primarily a woman's field has been suppressed until very recently. After twenty years of studying and practicing architecture, I discovered only two years ago that in nearly all the early civilizations women were the original builders, and that they still fulfill this role in many so-called developing countries.

Since building has become a specialized activity dominated by men and male values to the exclusion of female ones, a growing discrepancy has resulted between the social and psychological needs of all human beings and the planned and built environment. The shape an architecture might take in response to female priorities and values cannot be described with the same certainty as the traits of the architecture dominated by male values that surrounds us. However, there are some examples of so-called anonymous architecture, a few remnants of settlements of matriarchies, and a number of new critical statements from women criticizing modern architecture, as well as some built examples from female architects. These works speak another language, suggesting that there would be a significant difference between an environment shaped mainly by men and male values and an environment shaped mainly by women and female values.

## Hypothesis 1

Although it is impossible to define clear and exclusive categories for male and female architecture, it may still be possible to distinguish, in analogy to biology and psychology, male and female principles in architecture. These may be used by both men and women. However, under equal opportunity for their application (which certainly does not exist at the moment), women would tend to use female principles, and men male principles.

## Hypothesis 2

Male and female principles are not exclusive categories, but rather poles defining a continuum.

### The Female Principles

More user-oriented	than
More ergonomic	than
More functional	than
More flexible	than
More organically ordered	than
More holistic	than
More complex	than
More socially oriented	than
More slowly growing	than

### The Male Principles

designer-oriented
large-scale, monumental
formal
fixed
abstractly systematized
specialized
one-dimensional
profit-oriented
quickly constructed

## Hypothesis 3

It is the overwhelming dominance of the male principle that is at the root of architecture's problems today, rather than the inherent merit of the female principle and fault of the male. Dominance of the female principle would be equally bad, although it may be necessary for a time to restore balance. Architecture at its best merges function and form, flexibility and inflexibility, fitness to the individual scale and appropriateness to the larger social context, as well as service to the user and the creative action of the designer.

## Hypothesis 4

Only through the synthesis of all these contradictory demands is it possible to create a true alternative to current architecture dominated by male principles and values.

# Male Principles in Architecture

Margrit Kennedy

## Hypothesis 5

Women architects are perhaps better prepared to achieve this synthesis by virtue of having been trained in childhood to be person-oriented, emotional, and later having been formally trained to be rational, logical, abstract. Their male colleagues, in contrast, are socialized along a one-sided male value scale which is seldom counterbalanced by an education including affective and social learning.

## Hypothesis 6

Men as well as women who pursue female principles or a holistic approach to architecture and planning are confronted by the same barrier: the devaluation of female principles which began with the victory of the patriarchal system in prehistoric times.

## Hypothesis 7

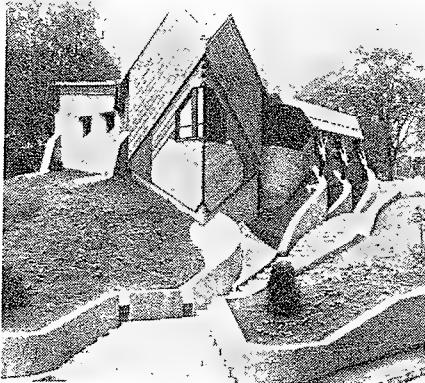
Two factors, in combination, make possible the reintroduction of the female principle:

1. The increasingly apparent limits of growth, vanishing resources, and inadequacy of the linear approach.
2. Larger numbers of women entering male-dominated fields with a consciousness of female values and the courage to attempt their expression in architecture, planning, and professional relationships.

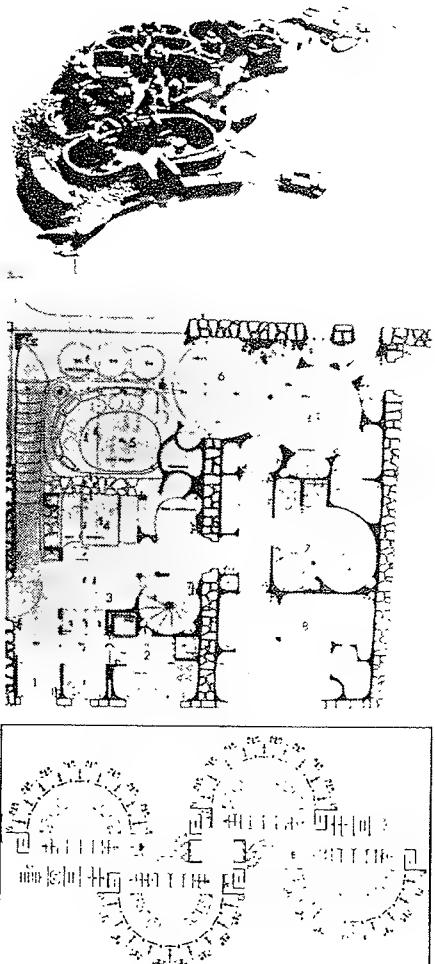
In addition to the manifold problems which women have in combining their professional lives with their roles as mothers and wives, it is often their natural skepticism toward standard criteria for success in a male-dominated field which hinders their development. That equal pay, rights, and opportunities do not necessarily mean equal values and priorities is something new and probably more difficult to define and to insist on than previous steps toward women's liberation. In order to take this step, women will increasingly have to work together, to support each other, and to encourage each other to enter, reenter, and stay in the profession. They possibly will have to go some part of the way in isolation in order to find themselves and discover what their own values and priorities are. Without this work for a conscious qualitative difference to what exists at present, however, the slow but steady quantitative increase of women in the profession will remain without significance for the future of our natural and built environment.

*I think woman retains a more human relationship to human beings and is not corrupted by the impersonality of powerful interests. I have watched women in law, in politics, and in education. Because of her gift for personal relationships she deals more effectively with injustice, war, prejudice. I have a dream about woman pouring into all professions a new quality. I want a different world, not the same world born of man's need of power which is the origin of war and injustice. We have to create a new woman.*

—Anais Nin, *Notes on Feminism*



Karla Kowalski, with Michael Szyszkowitz and Helmut Spiluttini, Funeral Chapel Schwarzach St. Veit, 1978.



There is a quantity of work both from matriarchal prehistoric civilizations and by women architects today which shows a preference for round or oval shapes. Top: Model of Maltese temple, 2300-1900 B.C. Middle: Claude Häusermann-Costy, plan of concrete-shell house. Bottom: Margrit Marx (Offenbach), plan for socialized medical care facility.

Margrit Kennedy, an architect and planner practicing in Berlin, is currently researching ecology, energy, and women's projects for the 1984-86 International Building Exhibition in Berlin.

# Women House Themselves

Gerda R. Wekerle

**W**omen have special housing needs which currently are not being met by the open housing market or by social programs aimed at assisting disadvantaged groups. They are, instead, being met by women themselves. This lack of concern was demonstrated at a recent self-help housing conference held in Berkeley. While discussion focused on the special needs of Hispanics, Blacks, farmworkers, rural residents, and center city dwellers, no one mentioned women as a prime target for these housing programs.

Kathleen Klessen, a planner from San Bernadino County, California, remarked on this omission. She reported that, in her experience, women face considerable discrimination in availing themselves of housing rehabilitation programs. Single mothers are frequently ruled ineligible for low-interest subsidized mortgage loans on the grounds that child support and AFDC are not "predictable" income. Wherever "sweat equity" (the person's own labor) makes up for a low down payment, women responsible for childcare may be excluded on the grounds that they have little time left to renovate a building.

Women's participation in self-help housing was not deemed a priority by conference participants. This is especially disturbing given that they represented a small but innovative housing movement, which celebrates individual initiative and collective solutions rather than reliance on mass housing developments and public housing. In many areas of the country, rehabilitation of abandoned or deteriorated dwellings is becoming almost the only alternative for providing low- and moderate-priced housing. New units are too expensive and rents have escalated in response to rent control (or its threat) and the scarcity of apartments caused by conversion to cooperative or condominium ownership.

Families headed by women experience the greatest difficulties in this housing market. By March 1977, they numbered 7.7 million, nearly one out of every seven families. Families headed by women are more likely than husband-wife families to have children under the age of 18, and one out of three lives below the poverty level, although more than half of the women

work full- or part-time outside the home. According to a recent HUD study, families headed by women are less well housed than the general population; they live in older housing, which is less well maintained than the national average, and they are more likely to rent than own. They are also more likely to live in center city neighborhoods. The likelihood of living in inadequate housing increases if women are Black, Hispanic, or heads of large families. Besides having less money to support their families, these women are overtly discriminated against by landlords. Adequate housing costs a woman head of household a very much larger proportion of her income than it costs the average American.

Women have started to take matters into their own hands. A recent development has been the emergence of several self-help housing projects directed exclusively at the housing needs of women heads of families. These projects, described below, have certain innovative features that are not generally part of other self-help efforts: they are grass roots projects originated by low-income women for low-income women. In responding specifically to the needs of women heads of families, the concept goes beyond shelter and incorporates necessary supports such as counseling, skills training, and provisions for childcare.

## Grass Roots Women's Program: Women's Information Service for Housing

The San Bernadino County Women's Information Service for Housing (WISH) was initiated in response to demand by women in the community. A door-to-door survey of more than a thousand low-income households identified problems with existing services. Kathleen Klessen says:

*Housing was one of the top priorities mentioned in the survey. The city is low density, mostly single family houses. In going door-to-door, we found that women are isolated, and often speak no English; they are afraid to go out of the house.*

On December 19, 1978, the Community Services Department (CSD) organized a workshop for 150 low-income

women to discuss priorities for a Grass Roots Women's Program. The concerns expressed included lack of available low-income housing in the community, rapidly escalating rents, and the fact that single women with dependent children often cannot find suitable housing and are subject to rent gouging. The women wanted particularly to learn basic repair, maintenance, and renovation skills. They felt that rehabilitation of existing deteriorated or abandoned houses was the only way for them to ever own a home.

Surveys made by CSD confirmed the severe problems identified in the workshop. In 17 census tracts with more than 20% poverty households, they found 3,346 women heads of households and 54,848 women ages 18-65+ living at or below the poverty level. More than 24% of the existing housing stock needed some kind of improvement and in the last five years only 60 new low-cost homes had been built in the county.

In response to this critical need, CSD allocated \$40,000 to WISH for their first year. Their application for \$25,000 from the California Department of Housing and Community Development to set up a Housing Advisory Demonstration Project for low-income women was approved in spring of 1979. Of the 19 projects funded by the state's self-help housing program, this was the only one dealing exclusively with the housing needs of women.

Key elements of the WISH proposal included information workshops on existing government housing programs and available financing, classes in basic home repair skills, and plans to involve women in community development. The project had to be considerably scaled down due to delays in funding by the state (funds were obtained in March 1980, almost a year after program approval), changes in the housing market, and changes in the priorities of the sponsoring agency. Within a year mortgage interest rates had peaked at 17% and a minimum income of \$24,000 a year had become the requirement for home purchasers in the county. Under these circumstances, the workshops to teach women at the poverty level about home purchasing became a dead issue.

Basic home repair skills such as plumbing, electrical work, bricklaying, and cement-laying were taught to 50 women who did approximately \$10,000 of work to their own homes. So far, one graduate of the program has started her own business doing minor home repairs for a fee. Wherever possible, WISH planned to use women instructors as role models. In reality they couldn't find women instructors with repair skills and experienced considerable difficulty hiring skilled tradespersons on a part-time basis.

The program hoped to reach 200 women and identified women heads of families as its primary target group. Various forms of outreach, such as notices in supermarkets and at community centers, were tried. Sylvia Rodriguez-Robles, Coordinator of the Grass Roots Women's Program, explains, "It took time to get women to come to class for something as nontraditional as fixing up their own homes." To her surprise two-thirds of the participants were senior citizens; only one-third were single females with children. The women were given \$10 per session to purchase childcare.

In retrospect Rodriguez-Robles says, "When we started our energies were high, we were all geared up, but our priorities changed while waiting for funding a year later." Housing is now only one of the concerns of the Grass Roots Women's Program; currently employment and education have become higher priorities. According to Rodriguez-Robles, it has taken considerable time and energy to launch a small, underfunded, short-term pilot project geared specifically toward meeting the housing needs of women while existing programs with more money and staff continue to ignore women's needs. She suggests that women's energies might be better spent in enforcing compliance so that programs with ongoing funding will increase services to women.

Community redevelopment, especially involving women in planning a neighborhood environment more conducive to their needs, has been a long-term objective of the WISH program. Rodriguez-Robles stresses:

*I agree very emphatically that present-day urban cities and neighborhoods focus on the traditional nuclear family and give very little consideration to single-headed households. While brainstorming ideas for our housing repair program, we envisioned a "redeveloped" neighborhood, with a strong sense of community support to the well-being of the family. This "redeveloped" neighborhood would have a day-care center, a cooperative food market, public transit and social services at the neighborhood level.*

WISH has maintained community devel-

opment as a priority. The City of San Bernardino has obtained funding from the Federal Neighborhood Housing Services Corporation for the revitalization of selected neighborhoods, and the Grass Roots Women's Program has been actively involved in the planning meetings, where they emphasize the need to include support services for families such as day-care and play centers for children. Rodriguez-Robles reports: "When we first started talking, this was all Greek to people, but now this concept of including a flexible plan for human services has started to appeal to others on the steering committee."

### Building for Women

Several other projects involve women heads of families in self-help housing. The Building for Women Program for women ex-offenders operated by Project Greenhope in New York City has rehabilitated a house in East Harlem and gives women job training in repair skills. A one-year \$80,000 CETA contract employed nine persons, including two administrators, two teachers, and five handypersons. A Community Development loan at 1% interest for 30 years allowed them to gut and rehabilitate a four-unit abandoned building on East 120th Street. Under the terms of the loan, the women completed all the interior demolition, site work, and finishing. The framing, roof, electrical, and mechanical systems were handled by professional contractors. The Urban Homesteading Assistance Board (UHAB) provided technical assistance. In addition, the program has received funds to rehabilitate a city-owned store to be used for their office and shop space.

Building for Women has become a major community resource. They are trying to obtain more funding to renovate other buildings on the block and create a climate which will encourage private rehabilitation. They have a contract to weatherize dwelling units for low-income tenants, home owners, and senior citizens. They teach carpentry, simple repairs, and furniture building to other women in East Harlem.

This is a good example of a solution which serves several needs simultaneously: women who are newly released from prison and have experienced nothing but failure and dependency gain valuable job skills and the satisfaction of successfully renovating a building to provide housing for other women like themselves. They become reintegrated through their work on community buildings and classes for neighborhood women. Instead of merely receiving assistance, they are in a position to offer a valuable service.

### Single Parent Housing Cooperative

In the summer of 1979, a group of nine single mothers formed to develop a single parent housing cooperative in Hayward, California. Rents in the city have doubled in the past few years, and heavy conversion of rental units to condominium housing has made costs prohibitive for many single parents. This project is now in the development stages: Eden Housing, Inc., a nonprofit developer, is directing the project and has a contract with the city of Hayward to organize and implement the cooperative. Funds from the HUD Community Block Grant Program are paying for such pre-development expenses as site acquisition and architectural and staff fees.

A large part of the effort to date has involved finding single parents who might be prospective residents, educating them in cooperative principles, and involving them in the initial planning process. The developers spent three months publicizing the cooperative in places frequented by single parents—housing offices, welfare departments, day-care centers, and churches. This generated 125 inquiries. Since late fall of 1979, they have held community meetings every six to eight weeks with an average attendance of 35 to 50 single parents.

Participants have discussed and approved the guidelines for selection of residents. Architects Sandy Hirschen and Mui Ho of the Department of Architecture, University of California, Berkeley, are currently doing programming work with the staff and single parents. The plan is to develop a project which will house from 20 to 25 families and be supportive of their needs by incorporating childcare and a food cooperative. Difficulties have been experienced in finding a suitable yet affordable site for the housing.

### Some Thoughts on Women's Self-Help Housing

In the past, women's housing needs have not been a priority either of the housing industry or of government housing programs. Nor has housing been an issue of the women's movement in the same league with health care or childcare. None of the projects described here was started by professional feminists or even particularly supported by organized women's groups. The projects represent the grass roots initiatives of community women. Perhaps because low-income women heads of families are being so hard pressed in today's housing market, they have decided to help themselves, as no one else seems to care. In taking action, they have become much more demanding and visible. They are insisting that housing programs and government agencies respond more directly to their needs. In

fact, all of the women's self-help housing projects are affiliated either with government agencies or with other nonprofit community groups. Much as these organizations have ignored women's housing needs in the past, such coalitions help single mothers to overcome the considerable obstacles relating to information, funding, and technical and organizational skills. Women, however, have learned the lesson of public housing and prefer to retain control and demand only the necessary resources to help themselves.

Women have much to gain by participating in housing rehabilitation and self-help housing programs. They can acquire decent, safe, affordable housing which they control. They can be directly involved in the design of the unit and can include provisions for collective facilities and shared services; they can gain job experience and a sense of confidence in their own skills.

The projects described here are important because they provide models of how women can use self-help to house them-

selves and their children. But each case also shows the obstacles that women face and the hard work that is required to get a women's self-help project off the ground. Women have the *right* to equal access to self-help and housing rehabilitation programs—most of which are paid for by public funds. They must demand that existing laws like the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (1974), which bars sex discrimination in housing and in the receipt of benefits from Community Development-assisted programs, be effectively enforced.

Women must demand that self-help housing programs meet their needs. For instance, childcare should be included as a regular cost of any program. And finally, women must lobby for alternative home and neighborhood designs which will free them from total responsibility for their own family and from isolation in the home. Otherwise, self-help housing will only replicate patriarchal patterns, and the possibilities for real control by women over their housing environment will be lost.

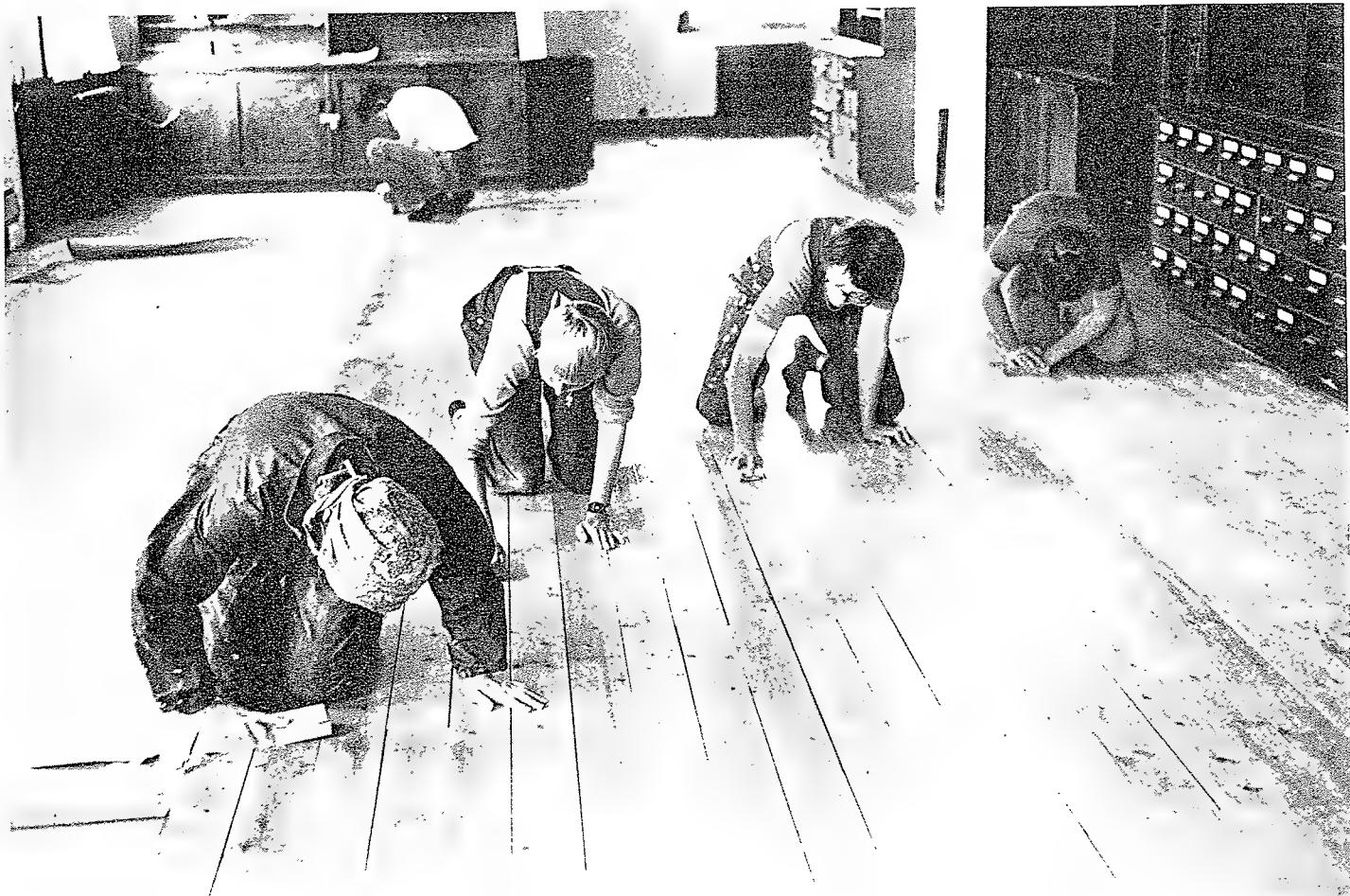
*The addresses of the programs described are:*

Sylvia Rodriguez-Robles  
Grass Roots Women's Program  
Community Services Department  
686 East Mill Street  
San Bernardino, Cal. 92408

Building for Women  
448 East 119th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10035

Single Parent Housing  
Harriet Dichter, Project Manager  
Eden Housing, Inc.  
1065 A Street, Suite 222  
Hayward, Cal. 94541

*Gerda Wekerle is Associate Professor in Environmental Studies at York University, Toronto, Canada. She is co-editor of New Space for Women (Westview Press, 1980).*



Women renovating a woman's house in Göteborg, Sweden. Photograph by Gun Anderson. Used by permission of Gun Anderson.

*Editors' Note:*

*We discovered several other projects in which women have begun to take an active role in the planning of housing and communities. In contrast to Wekerle's examples, three of the following efforts illustrate projects where architects themselves have taken the initiative in order to share their skills and knowledge in creating environments which are more sensitive to women. Unique to all these projects, both those described by Wekerle and the ones that follow, is the premise that problems of housing and community are closely linked to all aspects of one's life—employment, transportation, day-care, and services. Whether the attempt to integrate these various facets of living is exclusively female is speculation at this point. It is clear, however, that the women involved in these projects have all made a commitment to structuring an environment that is much more than the simple, safe dwelling unit.*

# Women's Design Collective

Susan Francis

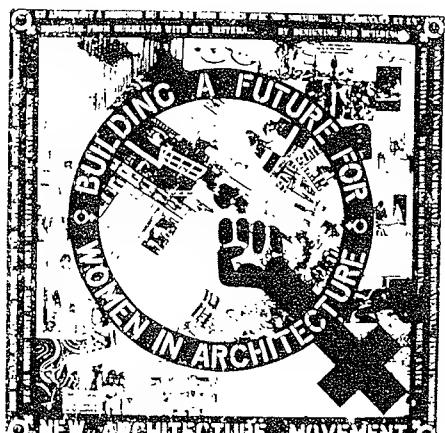
**W**ithin the past several years in Great Britain women in the design and building fields have come together to discuss the design and production of buildings, as well as their personal experiences working in a predominantly male discipline. (Women constitute less than 5% of registered architects and less than 4% of those employed.) The group that has formed as a result of these discussions maintains close and informal ties with the New Architecture Movement (NAM), a national network of radical architects and building users. Among other projects, NAM produces a bi-monthly magazine called *Slate* (an issue of which was devoted to feminism and architecture last year).

Initially our group of women held a series of open meetings to discuss sexism in the building press, to develop a critique of both the theoretical and practical work of particular women, to share our experiences of isolation and oppression at work and at home, and to promote dialogue on broader feminist issues. In collaboration with several feminist anthropologists we organized a conference on "Women and Space," which brought together from all over Britain women from a wide range of related disciplines. Several groups with particular objectives emerged from the conference, including a team of women who are making a film. Another group is attempting to develop a feminist critique of buildings and space which recognizes the importance of the social and political context of both the organization of production and the design process itself.

Still another group, with a more practical bias, has been working together as a feminist design collective. Consisting of

about 20 women who are training or working as architects, this collective has undertaken various projects on a part-time basis. The projects have included renovating five terrace houses in South London into a refuge for battered women and their families, developing alternative proposals for a health care center (endorsing a report produced by several community groups in opposition to a plan drawn up by the local council and health authority), and setting up a skills center to enable women to learn and practice carpentry and joinery skills. This last project was initiated with the specific intention of providing opportunities for women who, for various reasons such as having children, find it difficult to register for government training courses. The design collective produced drawings and written information for the conversion of a factory unit into a skills center. The building work was done by women tradespersons, with a variety of skills, who came together for first time from different parts of Britain. Some of these women are now teaching in the skills center and others have formed a women's building cooperative and are continuing to work together in the London area. The skills center project was funded jointly by the central and local governments. Whether funds for similar projects will be available in the future is in doubt, given the extensive cutbacks in public expenditure and the negative attitude toward women's engagement in production.

Despite the bleak economic outlook, some of us feel optimistic and very excited about working together. Within the design collective different interests and concerns have been expressed; we expect these



Panel designed by NAM Feminist Group, exhibited at the Beauborg, Paris. Courtesy Susan Francis.

to become manifest with the formation of several smaller groups, generating a variety of projects. Some women hope to work closely with the building cooperative to break down traditional barriers between professionals and manual workers. Other women hope to do applied research to develop a feminist approach to the design of space. Still others wish to concentrate on acquiring management and design skills in a more conventional manner. We hope to maintain links with the broader discussion group as a means of becoming more aware of the specific ways in which women are oppressed by patriarchal design and use of space and as a means of fighting collectively for changes.

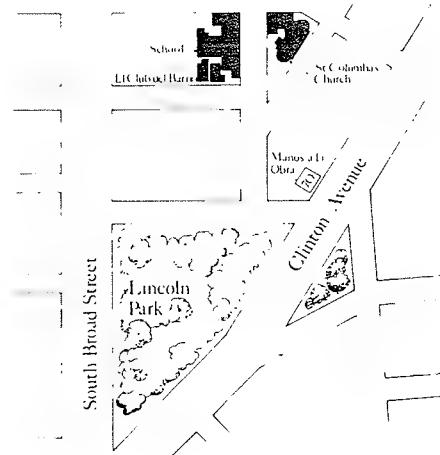
*Susan Francis, an architect practicing in Great Britain, recently submitted a thesis, New Women, New Space: Towards a Feminist Critique of Building Design.*

# Sweat Equity and the Women of St. Columba's

Christine Lindquist

Early in 1980 El Club del Barrio, St. Columba's Church Neighborhood Club, paid the city of Newark, N.J., \$1000 for an abandoned three-story brick Italianate townhouse, where they expect to house six families through sweat equity. This effort symbolizes the struggles of a Hispanic Community—primarily women—to survive and make a better life for themselves and their families. It illustrates the process through which women, who might not identify themselves as feminists, can begin to gain some control over their lives. Their conscious motive is to create a better life for their children, suggesting a certain female tenacity in the face of caring for and sheltering one's children.

This is a morality play that has not ended; good has not overcome evil and the meek have not inherited the earth—as yet. However, we do have players, a setting, and a classic conflict. The players are the Puerto Rican residents of a Newark neighborhood, the sisters of St. Columba's Church and School, the officials of the city of Newark, a large commercial development group, and the legions of gentrification waiting in the wings.



Lincoln Park area of Newark, N.J. Courtesy Christine Lindquist.

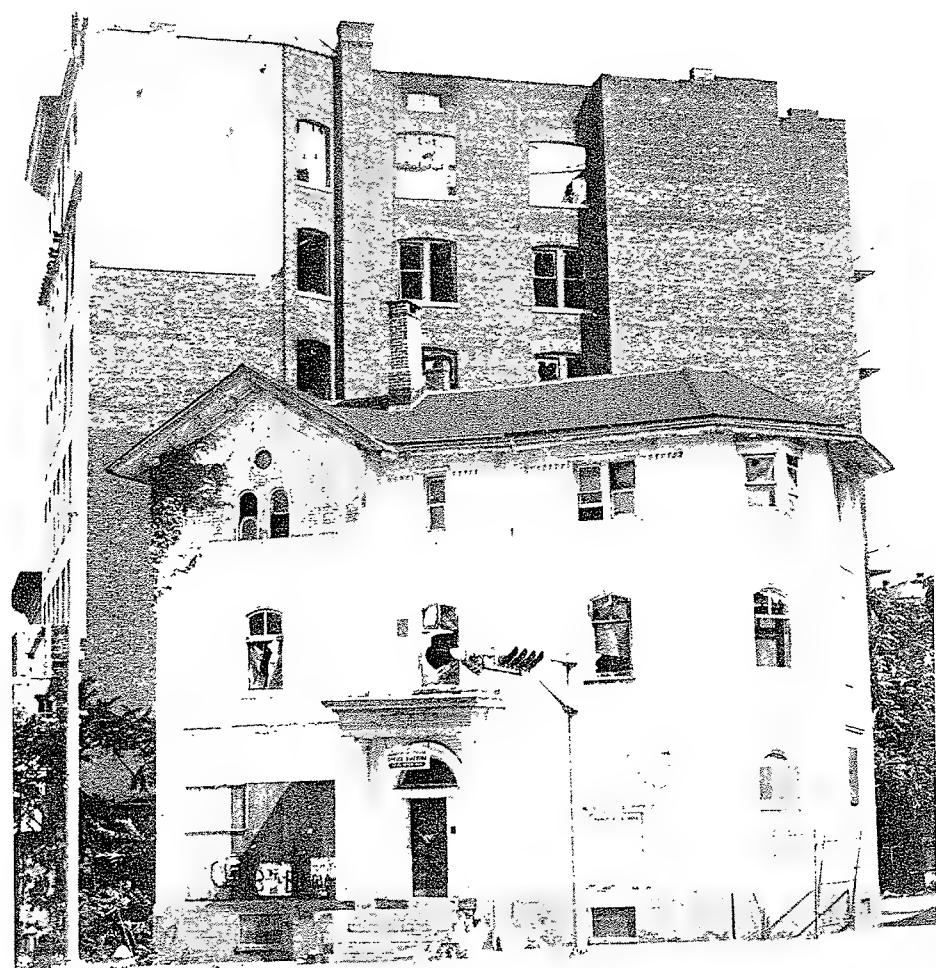
The setting is the Lincoln Park/South Broad Street section of Newark, once the most fashionable area of Newark, now a working-class neighborhood. Magnificent 19th-century townhouses and landmark churches rim the park. A half-block away is St. Columba's R.C. Church, a lovely Beaux Arts structure tucked into a tiny, triangular plot. Across the street is the school which serves as a center for the community. Yet, as in other cities, this neighborhood has its abandoned, scorched buildings; it lacks a healthy economic

base. In 1974 it was declared a redevelopment area, which brought the promise of future federal monies as well as possible gentrification or large-scale commercial development. At this point the Neighborhood Club members decided to take matters into their own hands.

The conflict really begins in 1972, when a development group started to rehabilitate nearby buildings for Sections 236 and 8 occupancy (federal programs which assist private sector development in target areas). Neighborhood residents were concerned by the poor quality of this work and by the fact that the buildings contained fewer apartments after rehabilitation. A group of concerned neighborhood women began to meet with Sister Deborah Humphries, who had just come to St. Columba's as a school social worker. At first they discussed their children,



The abandoned townhouse purchased by El Club del Barrio. Photo by Gail Price.



then themselves, and later the problems in the neighborhood—housing, drugs, and prostitution. They decided to take action and organize into two clubs: Madres en Accion and Madres Unidas. Initially the women taught each other such skills as cooking, guitar playing, and sewing in these self-help groups, which soon grew to include high school equivalency classes and numerous services related to employment, food stamps, welfare, counseling, and translation.

It became clear to them that the key problem was the housing crisis. The commercial development group was producing appallingly poor housing and violating the rights of relocated tenants. Some tenants were given 30-day eviction notices although the law requires 90 days. Other tenants were relocated three times while their buildings were rehabilitated, and not all tenants were able to return to their buildings because there were fewer rental units. Those who could return to their "rehabilitated" buildings found such con-

ditions as water running down walls, floors separating from partitions, undulating floors and stairwells, and tile floors in basement apartments which wore away to reveal earth underneath. During a discussion of his firm's work at the New Jersey School of Architecture, a representative of the developers maintained that the neighborhood women's claims were greatly exaggerated; the buildings were old—what did those people expect anyway?

City Hall did not officially respond to the club's complaints. What help did come was meager. After a long struggle with the city bureaucracy, the Neighborhood Club purchased the building at 70 Clinton Avenue. The Newark Housing and Redevelopment Corporation then completed a set of as-built drawings for the club to begin its work.

The club has elected a board of directors to oversee the project. A modified sweat equity plan will be used in which the families will provide the unskilled

labor, while carpenters, electricians, and plumbers will be paid. Finally, the six families have been selected and are now learning about the various complexities of self-help housing.

We can be fairly certain that St. Columba's Neighborhood Club will succeed in this housing venture, but one can only wonder how long people, especially women and children, are going to continue to be pawns in various struggles for power. This story is an example of the difficulty of putting feminist theory into practice. We believe that we must seize control over our own shelters as builders, designers, and consumers. This project, as described, is only the difficult beginning of that process for these women. As one of the women said at the onset of the project, "It really is survival more than anything else."

*Christine Lindquist grew up in Western Pennsylvania, left home to work as a stage-hand, and found her way to the New Jersey School of Architecture in Newark.*

# Women's Development Corporation

Katrin Adam, Susan E. Aitcheson, and Joan Forrester Sprague

**A**wareness of these factors led to the creation of the Women's Development Corporation in 1979. For six years before founding the nonprofit organization, the three of us had collaborated as architects and planners. Through paid and volunteer projects, private practice, and the founding and coordination (with many other architects and planners) of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture, we discovered that we shared a concern for the way many issues affect women. Moreover, we shared an interest in becoming advocates to improve women's long-term housing and economic stability through the establishment of a nonprofit development corporation.

Detailed planning for the corporation began in the fall of 1978. Funding was first sought from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; they did not finance the planning proposal, but the Women's Policy Program Division at HUD did suggest ways to proceed with other agencies. As a result, in addition to continuing our architectural and planning practices, we prepared a comprehensive proposal for funding and submitted it to the Community Services Administration in January 1979. The Economic Development Administration was contacted shortly thereafter. Funding was granted by both agencies in October 1979.

The Women's Development Corporation's first program is located in Providence, Rhode Island, more specifically in Elmwood—a multi-ethnic neighborhood in which more than half of the residents are single, widowed, or divorced women. The area currently has the state's highest percentage of families receiving welfare payments. The program includes planning with neighborhood women who are single and heads-of-household for cooperatively owned housing; it also provides means for women to gain housing-related skills and jobs, for example, in building construction and maintenance as well as housing management. The self-selected core housing planning group (four Hispanic and eight Black women) has met weekly in an intensive capacity-building program with the aim of assuming leadership roles within a larger housing planning group including others in the community. The majority of these women are in their twenties, with from one to eight children.

Objectives in the design of residential units focus on providing more variety than is typical in conventional apartments—for example, additional rooms or mini-units between units, to be used as shared guest space or rental units, and a number of different kitchen-dining areas, ranging from compact kitchen units in the living area to large eating/kitchen areas to serve more than one family.

*Single, widowed, and divorced women represent roughly a quarter of this country's population, and their numbers are increasing. Yet housing opportunities are generally based on traditional assumptions that not only lead to a denial of equal opportunity but also do not recognize new functional needs. Restrictive practices affecting the lives of many women have served to minimize their self-respect, hindered their access to credit, impeded their gaining and retaining jobs, and, thereby, have also reduced their housing opportunities. Many women face the burdens of poverty. Statistics show that on a national basis, most women who are heads of households live below poverty level.*

Housing planning is linked to assisting in the establishment and growth of related women's businesses and jobs, as a means of revitalizing Broad Street, the commercial strip bounding the neighborhood where the housing is planned. This program is geared toward individual entrepreneurs and self-help groups at various stages of development, from pre-business to small business expansion planning. One self-help group receiving technical assistance from the program is the South East Asian Cooperative, a cottage handicraft enterprise selling the works of over 50 Hmong women, recent immigrants to Elmwood from the mountains of Laos. Another project entails revitalization of a commercial building for new businesses. The plan is to provide neighborhood-based jobs along with necessary support services such as day-care, building main-

tenance, housing management, and food services (on a subscription or cooperative basis), as well as workshop and office space for various enterprises and organizations.

The broad aim of the Women's Development Corporation is to offer low-income women in a particular neighborhood of Providence a chance for stable housing within a support system network that encourages independence and self-sufficiency. This is necessary for many women in both urban and rural areas around the country. The move from poverty and welfare status to having good housing and work opportunities is obviously not an overnight or simple process, but the ability of many women at poverty level to balance scanty resources and raise their children shows tenacity, initiative, and imaginative budgeting—qualities that

can become the basis for more productive lives in response to a new environmental network offering positive opportunities.

*Katrin Adam, a practicing New York architect, consultant, journeyman in cabinet-making, co-founded the Women's School of Planning and Architecture. She also works with the Women's Development Project in Brooklyn.*

*Susan Aitcheson, an architectural designer, coordinated several sessions of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture. She was also active in the Nourishing Space and Rape Crisis Center, Tucson, Arizona.*

*Joan Forrester Sprague, a practicing architect, lecturer, and consultant, co-founded the Open Design Office (for women architects and planners) and the Women's School of Planning and Architecture.*



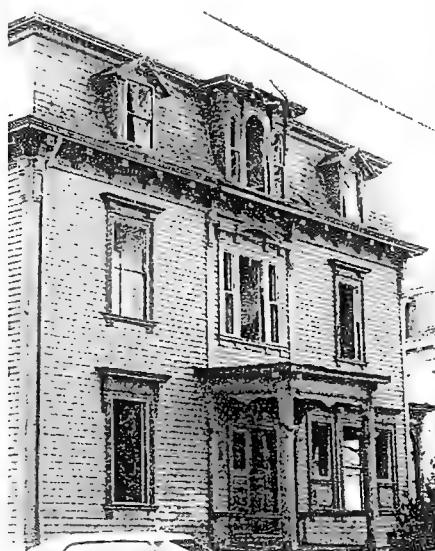
Program participants learning about reglazing windows in the building maintenance program.



Carpenter apprentice, member of the Women in Construction support group.



Program participants and staff in the Women's Development Corporation office.



Providence buildings like this are being considered for substantial rehabilitation.

# Architects' Community Design Center

## A Conversation with Toni Harris

*This excerpt is from a conversation between Toni Harris, Executive Director of the Architects' Community Design Center in East Orange, N.J., and Gail Price. The interview was sandwiched between meetings with the tenants' group in the Newark public housing rent strike and with applicants for the design center's training program.*



Toni Harris at her desk in the ACDC office.

*Gail: How did the community design center movement begin?*

*Toni: The community design center movement began in 1964. Design centers grew out of the politics of the '60s and all the problems of the cities. The community decided what they didn't want and what they wanted to restore. However, they didn't know if what they were dreaming about could be made real. They needed someone to help make the dreams feasible. That's where design centers came in.*

*When we first talked about your work you said you weren't an architect, but your work is so clearly architectural. How did you get started with the design center?*

In 1972 the New Jersey Society of Architects was looking for someone who could relate to the community and relate to them. I had been involved in community actions. I had lived in public housing and had been involved in improving housing conditions for the poor because I was one of the poor. But they were very picky. They checked all my references and interviewed me several times—to make sure I could do the job.

*Were you aware of architecture as an oppressive force?*

No. Being one of the poor, architecture was one of the last professions I knew anything about. I would never have thought that an architect was responsible.

and end up with a cooperative situation. I would like to see a self-sufficient neighborhood.

I would do anything I could to get rid of public housing as it is now—under a housing authority. I would abolish high-rise towers. Design, density, management, maintenance all have to be considered. I would have a lot more acreage and green space. I would also make them more sturdy so people could have permanent homes. The poor are here because of the capitalistic system; they are not going to go away. They need to have more choices....

I say down with the high-rise. Give us open spaces and stop piling people on top of one another. No ball playing, no pets, no noise, no frogs in your pockets—these places offer nothing that's normal for American kids.

*Please tell me about the training program that you have for young people in architectural drafting. It seems to me that although the products of architectural work are all around and influence everyone, you could live your whole life and never have to deal with an architect. It's as if they were invisible....*

*Especially if you are poor.*

*This has been a dream of mine since 1977. Black kids in the cities were not*

*Ellen White, Director of the Training Program, discussing work with a student.*



being exposed to architecture as a profession through their counseling, or lack of counseling. I thought that maybe cities would be better if more city youngsters were involved in design—but how could they aspire to something they knew nothing about? They had no frame of reference for it. We had to create opportunities for them to learn. We get hard-core unemployed people who have no prior training; we teach architectural drafting, problem solving, office practices, codes, construction... it's now an eleven-month program. We then find jobs for them in architects' offices. Two of our people have

gone on to architecture school. One of our young women ended training here September 5th and then started architecture school the next day. She's very bright; she seems to be very popular; I think it's due to her brightness. People recognize her skills and know they can learn from her.

*People obviously must recognize your skills. But what about being a woman in this work? What's your take on that?*

There are prejudices—she's a woman, a Black woman. I went to the architects' convention this past weekend, doing my

job. We are a nonprofit corporation, and I was trying to get support and contributions from the exhibitors. I was talking to one man, an exhibitor, and he just turned his back on me. I'm sure that was because I'm a woman. I'm going to write to his company about that....

I want you to know that there are a lot of women out there running design centers. It's not important to be an architect to run a design center; most of the women I know in design centers are not architects and they do their jobs very well. We are astute enough to listen and design with people. I like what I do.

## Resource List

*The following list of organizations and government publications was compiled by Leslie Kanes Weisman and Helen Helfer of the Women's Policy and Program Staff at the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).*

**American Planning Association: Planning and Women Division.** Formed in 1979, this is one of the newest and largest of the 13 subject area groups of the APA. Its two purposes are: to address issues concerning women in the planning and development of urban areas and to promote the growth of women in the profession. The division publishes a monthly newsletter which is available to non-APA members.

For more information, contact:  
Mary Deal, Director, Planning and Women Division  
American Planning Association  
1776 Massachusetts Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20036

**National Association of Women in Construction.** Established in 1955, this organization is composed of women in construction and construction-related industries. Some 7,000 members range from owners, managers, secretaries, bookkeepers, draftspersons, architects, and engineers to welders, carpenters, plumbers, subcontractors, and quality controllers. There are about 192 local chapters in the U.S. and Canada. NAWIC offers its members educational programs and scholarships and conducts seminars to interest women in construction careers. Members receive a monthly newsletter and magazine.

For further information, write:  
NAWIC  
2800 West Lancaster  
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

**National Congress of Neighborhood Women.** This grass roots community organization is currently directing a six-month planning project to establish a Low-Income Women's Resource Center in Washington, D.C. The goal of the project is to strengthen the capa-

bilities of low-income women in identifying and marshalling resources to improve the quality of life for themselves, their families, and their communities.

For further information, contact:  
Jan Peterson, Executive Director  
National Congress of Neighborhood Women  
11-29 Catherine Street  
Brooklyn, New York 11211

**Women's School of Planning and Architecture.** Founded in 1974, this national summer program provides a supportive and experimental forum in which women interested in the built and planned environment can exchange ideas and skills. The openness of the program and the experience of sharing with other women of diverse backgrounds make WSPA a unique learning opportunity. During the year, WSPA serves as a personal and professional network of women working for feminist social change via the environment.

For more information, write:  
Women's School of Planning and  
Architecture  
6706 5th Street  
Washington, D.C. 20012

**Women and Environments International Newsletter.** Published three times a year, the newsletter serves as an information and personal contact network. It publishes brief articles, book reviews, research abstracts, curricula descriptions, letters, events, and conference reports pertaining to women and the environment.

For more information, contact:  
Women and Environments International  
Newsletter  
c/o Faculty of Environmental Studies  
4700 Keele Street  
Downsview, Ontario, Canada M3J2R2

**Women's Policy and Program Staff.** This office within HUD helps individual women consumers and women's organizations to benefit more fully from HUD's housing and community development programs. WPPS reviews new and proposed policies of HUD programs and works with policy makers to modify or revise policies which adversely

affect women beneficiaries. The office serves as an advocate for women consumers and for women's needs regarding housing and community development issues. In order to encourage women to participate in the implementation of HUD programs in their neighborhoods, WPPS organizes seminars and conferences and distributes information. Currently WPPS is focusing on issues such as emergency housing for victims of family violence, participation of women business owners as contractors in HUD programs, the effectiveness of existing housing assistance programs in meeting the needs of female-headed households and women living alone, and the availability of suitable housing for women with children.

If you would like to be on the HUD mailing list or want further information, write:  
Director  
Women's Policy and Program Staff  
Room 4212  
Department of Housing and Urban  
Development  
Washington, D.C. 20410

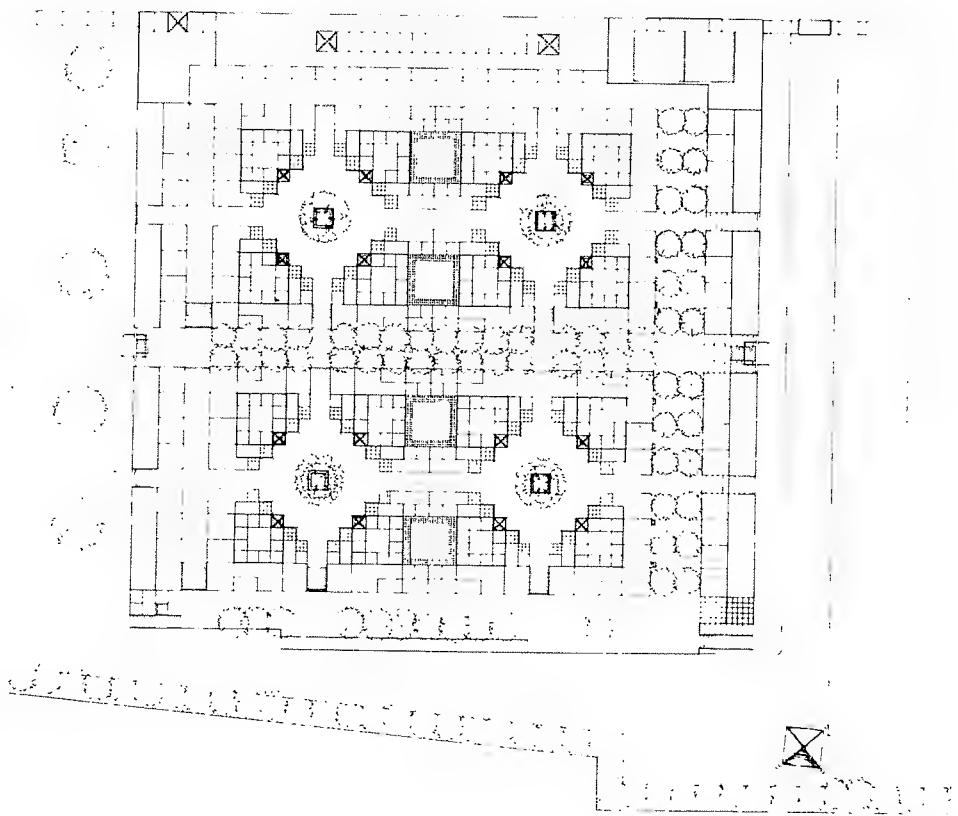
### Government Publications

**How Well Are We Housed? Female Headed Households.** Publication No. HUD-PDR-344. Office of Dissemination and Transfer, HUD, Room 8124, Washington, D.C. 20410.

**Women and Housing: A Report on Sex Discrimination in Five American Cities.** Prepared by the National Council of Negro Women, Inc., under HUD contract. Report 0-213-025, 1976. \$3.40 per copy through Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office.

**Planning, Women and Change.** Prepared by the American Society of Planning Officials under HUD contract. Report 301, April 1974. \$6.00 per copy through ASPO, 1313 East 60th Street, Chicago, Illinois.

**Women and the Mortgage Market.** Prepared by Ketron, Inc., under HUD contract, March 1976. Copies available from Office of Dissemination and Transfer, HUD, Room 8124, Washington, D.C. 20410.

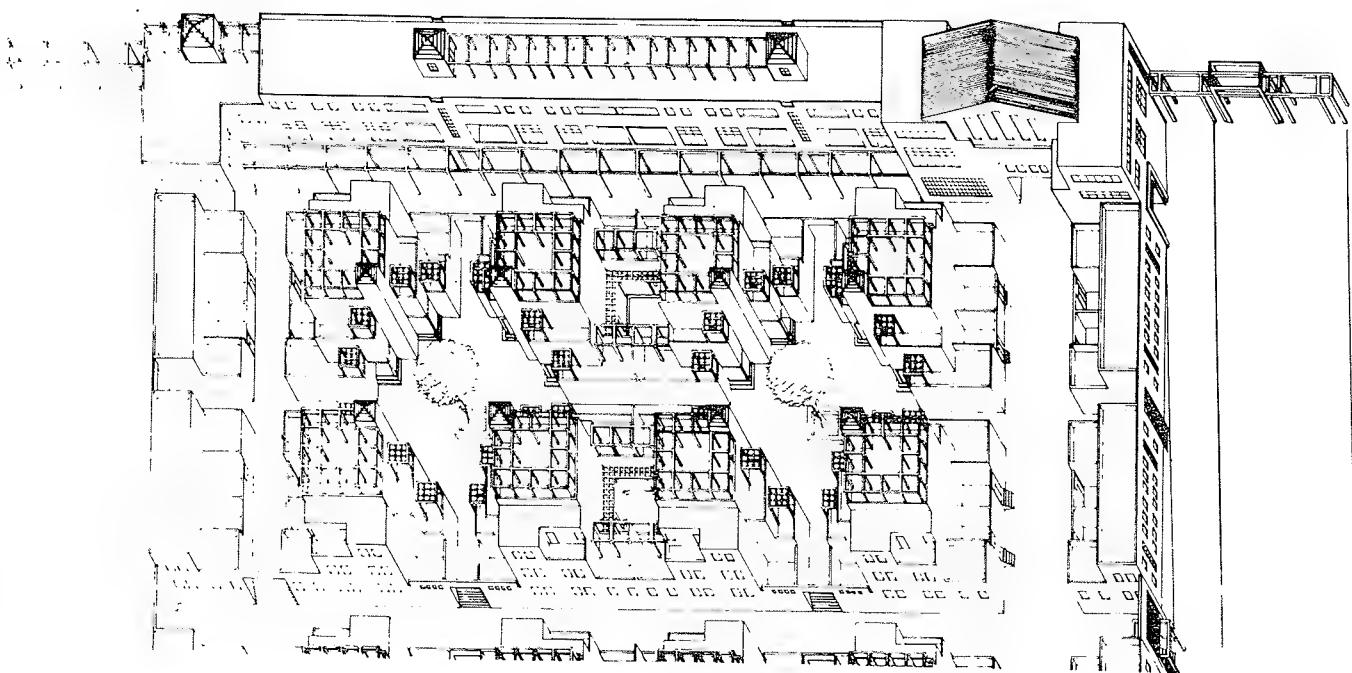


A housing plan that resembles rug patterns or pattern painting? "Carpet housing" is a type of design for apartments that assumes a great density of residential use at the ground level—covering a site like a "carpet." In general, but not exclusively, carpet housing includes private and shared courtyards. The form itself is derived from centuries-old Mediterranean villages, where individual and community were subtly balanced. In this housing scheme for Queens, New York, Rutholtz and Sung have made the shared-entry courtyards the focus of each cluster of apartments. A center for gathering and meeting, each courtyard is given prominence in the hierarchy of places in the housing project. Volumetrically and spatially, the designers have created a rich and variegated system out of a clear order that acknowledges both the complexity of human life and the power of the human mind to abstract form as an expression of values. (S.T.)

*Ruth Rutholtz and Diana Ming Sung worked as a team on this project. They are third-year students at the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning at Columbia University. Rutholtz is also an accomplished professional musician.*

# Carpet Housing

Ruth Rutholtz and Diana Ming Sung



# *The Woman's Commonwealth*

## *A Nineteenth-Century Experiment*

*Gwendolyn Wright*

Nineteenth-century America once abounded with communitarian settlements, each dedicated to the realization of a new and better society. More than 300 experiments defined new types of environments to express their philosophies. In most instances, commitment to social change encouraged a more egalitarian attitude toward women. Communities reevaluated the female role and domain, breaking down traditional dress codes and work assignments, encouraging equal participation, and often using women's design skills. Only one group took this challenge to its extreme and established a setting designed to accommodate a predominantly female society.

Most communitarian settlements—present-day communes, as well as the political and religious experiments of the past—have tried to develop a unique style of living. This individualist style gives the group an identity separate from outsiders and also acts as an outward sign of inner unity and purpose. The Woman's Commonwealth was conspicuously unique in its female membership, although the group occasionally admitted men. The Commonwealth women never preached or proselytized, yet daily they turned away requests for membership during their most successful years. Renunciation of their earlier lives strengthened the ties among the women, who usually numbered around 32 adults, but reached a high of 50 in 1880. Celibacy and religious fundamentalism earned the Commonwealth a certain notoriety as extremist, but, for these women, the mark of their community was their carefully deliberated way of life.

The Commonwealth originated in Belton, Texas, 140 miles south of Dallas, a frontier town of only a few thousand people when Martha McWhirter—the group's leader—began her weekly prayer meetings in 1866. Ridiculing their beliefs, especially McWhirter's claim that she could communicate directly with God, without a male minister's intervention, the townspeople labeled the group Sanctificationists or Sanctified Sisters, a title they accepted rather than adopted. "Sanctification" was the group's term for a pentecostal vision. McWhirter taught that a "sanctified" wife should separate herself from an "unsanctified" husband. It was not only modesty that kept the group from admitting their

stance of celibacy publicly, however. A wife's admission of celibacy meant that she forfeited all her property rights in a divorce trial. Celibacy was, for the Commonwealth as for the Shakers, also a practical issue, an escape from the hardship and grief that burdened most frontier women, who had little information about contraception techniques. The only acceptable alternative to too many children, and to the pain of many of those children dying young, was religious censure of sexual activity.

The Commonwealth's separatism was a touchy issue, and the Belton women who committed themselves to this group, often leaving their husbands if the husbands protested, faced years of ostracism and even physical attack for their choice. During their early years the Sisters tried to follow their religious beliefs, which included celibacy, in their own homes. Gradually, as opposition mounted and husbands protested, as the women were stoned on the streets and beaten in their houses, they began to share quarters for safety and sympathy. Several moved in with McWhirter, whose husband obligingly moved out. By 1883 they were building houses on their own land to accommodate the larger number of women. Animosity only increased with this isolation, however, for angry husbands organized vigilante groups and shot bullet holes in the front door of their homesteads, trying to scare the women home.

Yet, within 15 years, these women had challenged the authoritarian doctrines of their local churches and come to be accepted by the ministers. They had asserted their financial and sexual independence from their husbands, and won from the courts the custody of their children and the right to keep their own money. They had reversed a town-wide boycott to become economically successful and established a tight communal household. They had also given themselves a new, more secular name, more in keeping with their beliefs—and their statewide fame. The Woman's Commonwealth had become so successful that when they decided to retire to Mt. Pleasant, outside Washington, D.C., in 1899, the town of Belton begged them to remain.

Religion was the binding force of the group. A communal pietism based on personal devotion and visionary messages raised their spirits. Communism was their

economic base, a simple and direct policy of sharing work and return equally among themselves. Both concepts were common in the West of the 19th century, where economic cooperation was often necessary and where women socialized most often through Bible study and prayer groups. The Commonwealth applied the principles of equality and independence to their rights as women. Martha McWhirter expressed the connection explicitly:

*It was no longer women's duty to remain with a husband who bossed and controlled her. God made man and woman equal, and to woman in these last few days he has revealed his will concerning his own elect few. We are to come out and be the "peculiar" people.*

Her statement connected the issues that brought the women together. They clearly felt themselves to be unique and important. Isolation was an initial stage, but while it was a conspicuous and controversial stand, it was not a moral position.

While boundaries remained firm in their life style, the women eventually opened their environment. In 1886 the Commonwealth opened its doors to the public as the Central Hotel. It was unusual in the annals of communitarian history for a separatist group to share its territory, and equally unusual for a public hotel to function as a feminist enclave. The initial response from the town was a year-long boycott. But the Commonwealth women were secure enough in their beliefs to hold out. They were ready to have strangers share their territory, even if the strangers were traveling salesmen from other parts of the state. McWhirter arranged to have a spur of the railroad run through the town. She had the station built on the land she owned across from the Central Hotel. Advertising broadsides were distributed across the state, and the stories of excellent service, "home cooking," embroidered linens, and the elegant quarters of the hotel passed by word of mouth. For each new enterprise—the hotel, a dairy—the group conducted extensive research of other successful enterprises. Several Sisters, traveling in pairs, had journeyed to neighboring towns to work as chambermaids and gain first-hand knowledge of hotel management, for instance. Others made expeditions to Wisconsin dairy farms and to New York City hotels, later in the group's history. In

time, the people of Belton gave in. The Central Hotel was not only one of the best-known hosteries in the state, it also became the town's social center, where people collected for visits and meals on the weekends.

The women of the Commonwealth were also peculiar in their insistence on building, as well as designing, the various structures which made up the Central Hotel. In their first effort of 1883, they had a few days of advice from a local builder and some help from sons. They completed the house in less than a week. Three additional wood-frame houses went up during the next 18 months. Throughout their stay in Belton the women continued to buy and improve land, to build and rent houses, and consequently to play a major role in the town's development. (They sponsored several important public buildings, including the train station and a large theater, as well as the quasi-residential buildings of their own.) The largest structure on their hotel site was the yellow-brick building of 1891, but the women also erected 14 other frame buildings or additions during their stay in Belton. The hotel itself was a product of accretion, not of a single master plan. As we shall see, they not only built as the need arose, they also changed the use of various buildings, according to the number of visitors, the size of their own group, and the activities they were sponsoring.

The ability to make a success of the hotel was based on three principles: pragmatic decision-making under McWhirter's guidance, behavior research into efficient methods and client's preferences, and spiritual self-examination by the group as a whole. While most decisions came from their leader, many policies emerged from interpretations of the dreams of other members, discussed in informal meetings.

The Woman's Commonwealth, 1902. Courtesy Gwendolyn Wright. McWhirter is the second woman seated from the left.



This was particularly the practice with decisions within the group—arrangements for a trip to New York, the choice of their retirement home, for instance—while McWhirter defined policy with the outside.

The women of the Commonwealth believed that God spoke to them in revelations, giving daily guidance in dreams or visions, or occasionally in a less specific "delicate sense" which affected the group more or less as a whole. Interpretation was seldom a private matter, however, but came in group self-examination and open discussion. McWhirter's authority could support such dramatic participation, for her position was never questioned. In a deposition at the divorce proceedings of her daughter she humbly said:

*We have and believe in dreams and revelations from God. My judgment is generally taken in these matters by the members as best; but each member has about as clear an understanding of our revelations as the others have.*

Decisions were a collective matter, then, based on McWhirter's authority, but also on self-examination and private musings. Dream interpretation was as important a consideration as the group's businesslike research.

The Commonwealth had first separated from the dominant society around them for self-protection, opening their doors once group bonds could support public exposure. The hotel venture was, of course, an economic undertaking, but the change in policy was also a move toward more worldly values. Such a shift compares with the current women's movement which, after an initial period of separation and consciousness-raising, seems to be moving toward renewed exchanges with the larger world. Many of

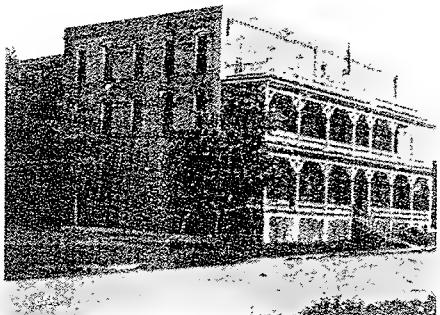
the difficulties the Commonwealth women faced—separation in separate homes, boring routines of housework, questions of self-identity and autonomy, legal inequalities—exist today. Then as now, spaces with associations of certain relationships, spaces like the kitchens and bedrooms and yards of their separate houses, encouraged certain ways for these women and their husbands to act. The Commonwealth's new spaces, and their ongoing experimentation with the environment, allowed for both the women and the men to change their ways of relating.

The Commonwealth women broke with the traditions of their town, with the way of life and the spaces that were supposedly appropriate for them. As religious pietists, they tried to create a place of peace and simplicity; as communists, they encouraged shared tasks and an efficient, joyous attitude toward work; as women, their specific goals were less clear-cut, but, I believe, especially strong. Their spatial organization reveals special concern for self-identity and pride in the experiences of daily homemaking. The spaces were ambiguous, chameleonlike, capable of being used in many different ways and by many different people. The interplay of public and private, sociability and self-awareness, remains one of the principal issues of feminism. Let me briefly consider how the environment the Commonwealth created related to these three sets of principles.

Emphasis on self-control and direct communication with God, familiar standards in American religious movements, has often led to asceticism, particularly in such material forms as buildings, furnishings, and clothing. This was true of the Woman's Commonwealth, which preferred simplicity and practicality to elaborate decoration. But austerity is too severe a label for such an aesthetic. With the Commonwealth, as with the Shakers, unpretentious styling was a conscious contrast to gingerbread detailing and "feminine" finery. For Victorian women, the house was demanding, with its profusion of objects and its elaborate symbolic references to sexual roles. Alternative styles in housing signified new sexual roles as well as a different design image.

The Central Hotel, created over a five-year period from 1886 to 1891, presented an unassuming facade and uncluttered interior. The site plan shows a series of buildings, built on or moved to the lot as they were needed. The interplay between this ongoing growth and the pietist respect for environmental design created a variety of spaces: a wooded yard of 100 square feet separating the older building from Main Street; an adjacent side yard for the hotel; a kitchen courtyard, paved in brick, to the rear; a narrow, irregularly shaped

plot spreading flowers beneath the dining room windows; a spacious area behind the two main buildings, divided into vegetable gardens, groves of fruit trees, and work areas by walkways and out-buildings. This too was based on a restrained, but scarcely a harsh aesthetic ideal.



The Central Hotel, 1891. Main Street elevation. Courtesy Gwendolyn Wright. The circulation system of three-story galleries provided wide, continuous porches. Here guests could visit and the sisters could work.

Interiors, like the women's starched white aprons and black dresses, were at first strictly plain. But as the hotel business began to thrive, the Sisters returned to embroidering pillowcases and embellishing the parlors. They were now acting from personal preference and not from dictated taste. By the time they left Belton and moved to Mt. Pleasant, styles were often elaborate and worldly. The young girls who were with the group—and enjoying it immensely, from all accounts—socialized and lavishly decorated their rooms. What the world labeled "feminine" was no longer an aesthetic which shielded them from the world, and they could freely enjoy decoration.

The Mt. Pleasant home—a structure they purchased for \$23,000 and then remodeled to the tune of another \$10,000, so that it would fit their communal needs—was a dignified, but quite splendid building. It stood three stories high, in grey brick, with two octagonal mansard towers looking out over the lawn and street. This was the chosen expression of the Commonwealth's design philosophy, at the point when most of the group had become bored with the limited challenges of rural Texas and wanted a more cosmopolitan life. McWhirter's description of a piano sent by the town of Belton for their new home describes their aesthetic:

*We are delighted with it—so sweet-toned, and the case could not suit us better—plain and yet grand. We are all well and delighted with our new home. Have made substantial and elegant improvements.*

For them, after an initial period of caution and restraint, neither pietism nor feminism had to mean severity.

With a theoretical background consisting of little more than a belief in equality and a foundation in religious apostolic traditions, these women developed from a group of backwoods eccentrics into a sophisticated social and economic organization. The naive beginning and the shared ideals stayed with them, nonetheless. A Washington journalist said admiringly that "the organization is due not to a theory, but to the practical necessities of the women composing it." That pragmatic approach was also reflected in the group's working arrangements.

Communism was, for them, a total way of life that benefited from a new set of work spaces. The Commonwealth's work attitudes brought down established partitions. In the Central Hotel, dining, work, and sitting areas were continuous. Large pantries and courtyards became integrated parts of the kitchen. The formal front parlor looked directly into the office lobby through a row of Corinthian columns, but not a wall. The group's schedule accentuated the room organization. Every woman's work day was officially only four hours long. The rest of the day was hers. Jobs rotated, weekly, giving everyone a share of the possible experiences and skills. Most important, the women could work with other people around, either one another or visitors to the hotel, rather than being isolated. There were also numerous places to go off by oneself when a woman wanted some real privacy. Every woman had the possibility of working as she wanted, and of choosing from many different kinds of spaces and different levels of social interaction.

The domestic styles prevalent at the time reinforced a separation between family and servant, man and woman, adult and child, by dividing the home into separate zones for socializing, housework and cooking, and privacy. Even though the layout of rooms and their size were beginning to respond to practical needs, rather than rules of symmetry, house plans still maintained a strict hierarchy. Similarly, in the Central Hotel plan, the location of kitchen and work spaces in the rear of the house did perpetuate some distinction between guests and workers, although isolating the smells and hot stoves was an important consideration for a hotel. However, the traditional "servant's area" or "woman's space" was a pleasant space in which to work, a space that was shared with other women and, when one moved out into the porches or yards, with people outside the group as well.

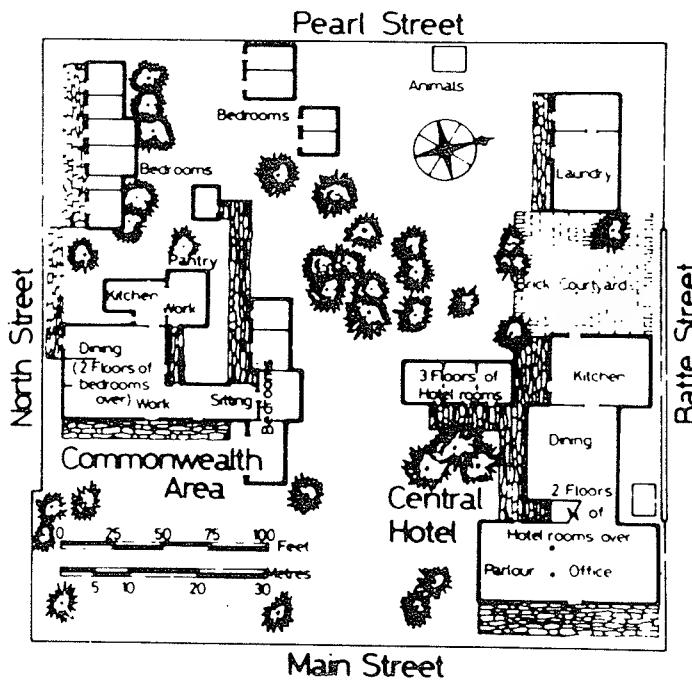
The Commonwealth buildings were an expression of one version of a feminist environment, at first harboring a group of

women, eventually giving expression to some of their values and experiences. Self-identity was an immediate and concrete goal for the Commonwealth. Their beliefs incurred a hostility that made living in society difficult and demoralizing. Therefore, the new surroundings supported these beliefs. Small individual bedrooms acknowledged their sexual code, as well as their respect for each woman's need for some privacy. Large group areas provided room for shared work and meetings. The reinforcement encouraged a high level of productivity, and the differences respected their chosen life. Such a focus on self-identity was a necessary first step before experimenting with other values environmentally.

The notion of adaptability soon came to play an important role in the Commonwealth's planning. It presupposed the freedom to reinterpret a given situation, to undergo change oneself. The Central Hotel bridged public and private spaces and made them both adaptable to numerous uses. Contemporary books on household decoration, in contrast, described efficient service areas and elegant reception rooms, but kept them rigidly separate and distinct. The women of the Commonwealth adopted some of the practicalities that had developed in these books on the home, and combined them with the grander architectural considerations in architectural treatises on public buildings. Their spaces adapted to the comforts and work-a-day considerations of the home, and also to the excitement and imposing presence of the civic building. This combination allowed for variations of the set behavior that had been associated with the two different kinds of spaces, for now they had been merged.

One aspect of adaptability was the multiple use of a space. Unfettered by traditional roles and averse to elaborate decoration anyway, the Commonwealth women reexamined the static definition of rooms. An important goal seems to have been spontaneous exchanges through mixed use of a space. This applied to guests, for whom the front parlor was a community meeting room, the town's first library, and a Sunday socializing spot. The Sisters' sitting room had a multiple focus too: prayer meetings, financial conferences, family visits, informal discussions, and other activities all took place here. The Mt. Pleasant parlor had a similar pattern of uses. It was a school—for children in the mornings and for the women themselves in the evenings. It also had ingenious arrangements that allowed the room to be used for dentistry, shoemending, rug-weaving, and other self-taught trades which the women continued to ply.

In theory, and in site plan, the Commonwealth women always had their own



Plan, Central Hotel, 1896. Courtesy Gwendolyn Wright. Note the open plan for communal work and social spaces in both main buildings. Private areas were scattered in small clusters.

area: bedrooms, sitting room, galleries overlooking interior courts where they worked, and, with the completion of the main building in 1891, a separate entrance. However, when the hotel became crowded, the Sisters would double up and give over their rooms, as well as their social spaces, to visitors. This act may have been a show of humility and self-sacrifice, a pure matter of pragmatic business considerations, or a testing of their unity. Whatever the rationale, the process demystified the environment—both personal space and group turf—by opening it so easily to outsiders. The continuum between private space and public space encouraged the group's closeness and, simultaneously, facilitated their ties with the rest of their community.

Commitment to Commonwealth beliefs was essentially a private, internal matter. Individuals cannot create sacred spaces for themselves if their rooms can be given over to strangers. If the group's special territory is undifferentiated from that of outsiders, there can be no exclusive place for reinforcing group identity. Separation from society for these women did not involve protecting a sacred center for themselves. Of course, most women, then as now, make a similar adaptation: all the space in a home is shared, so that they must learn to withdraw into an inner space for privacy and reflection. When others share and respect this mechanism, the inward retreat can be a positive step toward developing one's sense of self; otherwise, the search for inner space is

principally negative, an attempt to escape outside pressures.

Another important attribute often associated with women is attention to social spaces, a desire to create places for friendly and spontaneous mixing. (Today sociologists have coined the word "sociopetal" to indicate that such places tend to bring people together.) Perhaps the Central Hotel's most successful social space was the spacious gallery system that connected the various parts of the hotel. These covered arcades of one, two, or even three stories looked out over the town's main street or else on a garden. While the porch system itself was clearly not an innovation, particularly in the South, this complex adaptation extended the porch's social possibilities. The typical vernacular porch was an architectural adjunct to the house, a place where people could watch the activities taking place outdoors. In the Central Hotel complex, the galleries were widened so that a variety of activities could go on simultaneously. They were more than circulation spaces or places to sit and look out. Here one found some women working, others talking together, visitors lounging, and townspeople mingling in the activities on the porch.

The aim of the Women's Commonwealth, in their buildings and their philosophy, was neither final perfection nor an enduring pure form, but continuous involvement in process. They respected the work, the cycle that went into making a home environment, a meal, a pillow, or a friendship. Rather than focusing on only

the shell of external appearances—dress, house facade, acceptability—they turned their attention to meeting other needs which were constantly changing. This approach allowed them to undergo many changes themselves, and eventually encouraged them to leave their little town, a town that had come to revere this eccentric group of women, to seek new experiences elsewhere. Their building history exemplifies this attitude. Evolution as a group, like their design approach, had no ultimate goal, but consisted of a series of experiments. For some 40 years, they lived in this way, until McWhirter's death in 1904, at the age of 77, when the organization began to move on, in different directions.

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I would like to thank Dolores Hayden, Susana Torre, and Sheila Levant de Bretteville for their responses to this article in an earlier form. Three women of Belton—Vada Sutton, Lena Armstrong, and Bernetta Peeples—were extremely helpful during my research there, and deserve special thanks for keeping this piece of history alive, even though the buildings have been destroyed, in typical American fashion, for a gas station and parking lot.

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# Herspace

Phyllis Birkby

Virginia Gray's adobe house and Caroling's stained-glass dome can be seen as very personal and idiosyncratic spatial icons, but in fact they evidence a commonly shared sensibility among women. Over a two-year period Leslie Weisman and I collected hundreds of fantasy drawings by women all across the U.S.\* These drawings, representing women's hopes and frustrations in relation to the built environment, to shelter and to dwelling, had a great deal in common, and they can be compared to the adobe house and the dome. Both the drawings and the built projects are similar in form and they reveal a common content. The implied message is the desire to take control of space, space being at once the container of and a metaphor for life itself.

The drawings proved very valuable for both the maker of the image and for myself as its facilitator. The very process of making the images was a consciousness-raising experience. The cumulative result was a trove of images and symbols many women can identify with. But while these images can be seen as a point of arrival, they should also be seen—and I think this is even more important—as a point of departure. Fantasy is often the stage where women remain for lack of opportunities; to believe that the dream cannot be fulfilled leads to accepting any situation as stagnant and frustrating. Dreams of change and hope should not remain elusive images in the mind or even on paper. The act of drawing or writing is always the beginning of a more concrete communication.

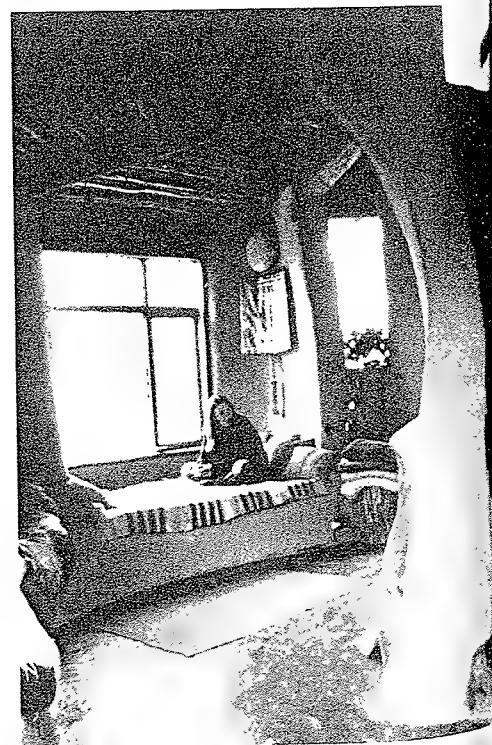
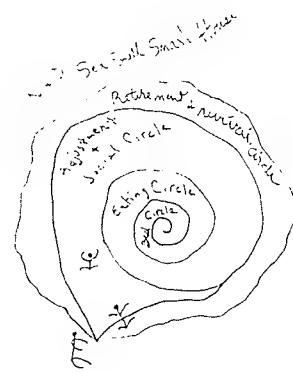
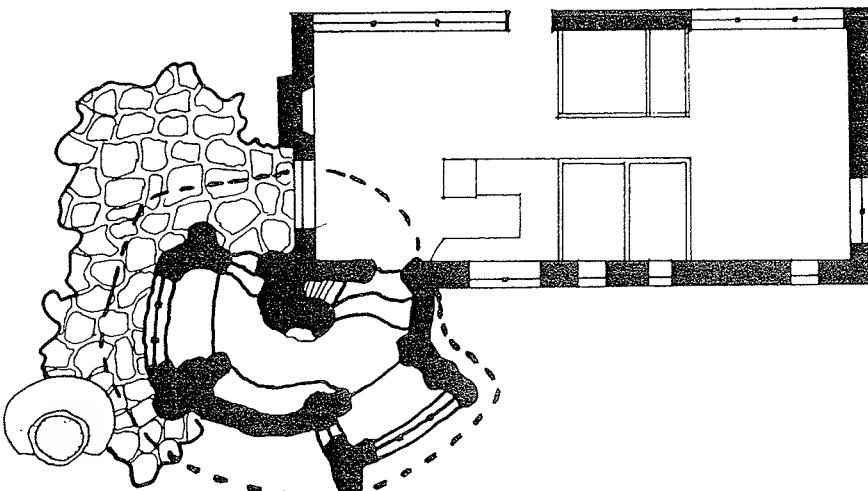
These acts are different from conversation, which is remembered selectively—parts forgotten or rearranged in memory and often translated into gossip. Unlike conversation, drawing and writing create tangible bases to build on.

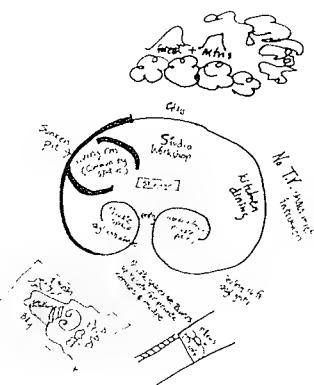
While it has been delightful to see in the fantasy drawings confirmation of a commonality of form and content among women, it has been even more rewarding to see in the drawings evidence of women taking control of space to meet their own needs, emotions, and desires. In doing so, women are building on their own and other women's fantasies.

Isn't this the meaning behind the seeming coincidence of a woman drawing and writing about her dream in New York (Frances Doughty) and another in California (Caroling) building an almost identical dream as a material reality? Isn't this why Virginia Gray's statements about her adobe house contain so many things in common with not just another woman's but with many other women's fantasies? Don't we find here evidence of what some call "female sensibility"? Aren't these signs of a common foundation for the expression of a uniquely female imagery of built form? Doesn't this show a creative process that emphasizes those qualities our culture associates with the female principle, with a greater reliance on feeling and intuition, on things not too carefully planned by choice?

Although the visions and processes presented here record individual endeavors, they provide us with the hope that is needed to move and build beyond idle dreams and desires. When we see that these individual solutions are not singular but exemplary, we realize that what is possible for one becomes possible for all. And what works for one woman's needs may be translated, as these projects suggest, and expanded to meet the needs of a group. The form achieved is both personal and collective, resonating with common meanings as it is communicated to others.

\*See Noel Phyllis Birkby and Leslie Kanes Weisman, "Women's Fantasy Environments," *Heresies*, No. 2 (May, 1977), pp. 116-117. See also drawings at top of page.





### Virginia Gray's Adobe House

Virginia Gray's adobe house is located in Santa Fe, an area rich in vernacular adobe construction, a building tradition continued by the native Pueblo population and adopted by the Anglo settlers. Virginia Gray settled there some 20 years ago after college and became a potter. Though she no longer makes pots, her knowledge and empathy with the ways of clay and mud have once again found expression in the larger container of her own house. The original rectangular house, designed by a male architect friend, was built ten years ago. This house was serviceable and comfortable enough, but Virginia eventually felt an urgent desire to make a space that would be more closely responsive to her own life. It would seem from the juxtaposition of the original house and Virginia's own addition that her impulse to break out of the rectangle results in an almost literal explosion through the wall. But in the end the new space does not entirely replace the old; rather, it establishes with it a dialogue between hard and soft, straight and curved, static and flowing spaces. Opposites are subtly transformed into options.

The new space seems to rush out and around the fireplace (a metaphor for the birth of this space?), which is like a tree trunk serving as a pivot for both horizontal and vertical movement. One climbs up this "tree" into an aerie—a very private, glassed-in space opening to views in all directions.

The larger space below is reversed in direction, with the three seating niches or alcoves (each different in size and feeling) clustering inward about the hearth. Variable degrees of privacy and togetherness are easily formed and communicated by the options and choices presented. Although not literally a womb, the space does seem to contract or expand according to each different use.

### Caroling's Dome

Caroling's dome is in the backyard of her own simple dwelling in Sonoma County, California. Partially hidden in the shrubbery, the gleaming dome reveals itself as one approaches it by foot from the road. Its entrance faces the path, inviting but not commanding entrance. Entering this space means participating in an act of physical and spiritual transformation. Colored light bathes everything inside: space, people, the soft surfaces, and the simple pillows and carpets used to furnish the space. Thus there is a wondrous unification, but one that changes with every movement and change of light. It is difficult not to experience a sense of instant connection with those who are gathered inside, of belonging to the same universe; and nothing interferes with this flow. As in Frances' fantasy (who has never been in this space), one feels suspended and swimming in light.

The dome, 14 feet in diameter, built of a light aluminum frame, almost disappears under the more visually prominent roofing layers of glass and lead, creating a surrender of geometric form to the form and structure of feeling. The images depicted in stained glass are expressions of Caroling's experiences and were "accumulated" in place rather than made part of a previously established design. Although they represent a past, they seem to be alive in the present. As in the human mind itself, the accumulation of colored images of perceptions and events in the dome's surface results in a personal "map." But one that is dynamic, filled with events depicted outside and beyond their temporal, linear sequence. There is no begin-

ning, no end, and transitions are almost imperceptible in the whole. The saturation of color is broken here and there by areas of clear glass, making the sky-dome one with the enclosure and expanding one's view. Although the dome is in some way an advertisement of Caroling and her work (she is a stained glass artist), the images do have the capability of communicating experiences and feelings that are universally shared by women.

Both Virginia's and Caroling's spaces are *centers*, imbued with ritual, psychic and spiritual qualities. Neither was actually built for a utilitarian purpose but rather for the more complex and rich function of *gathering*, including others in a space that is also intensely personal. Therefore, these spaces are neither exclusively public nor private. They are inclusive sheltering gestures, gentle containments that are as apt to provide a sense of inward psychological and physical security as to encourage a release of the mind, the spirit, and the senses.

### Frances' Fantasy

In the fantasy I am already there. I came in through a clear glass opening a person and a half tall and two people wide, shaped like the entrance to an igloo. The place I am in is a high rounded space: big, airy, the long axis at right angles to the entrance like the inside of a patchwork zeppelin built of stained glass. When I hold my arm out it has different bands of color resting on it, and when I move it the bands stretch and shrink and slide over the skin. It's like being in a warm sea of colors or living in a kaleidoscope... to swim, to move slowly exploring the play of color and motion.

When the colored air is too rich and the constant change of color gets tiresome, a group moves into one of the rest spaces—some large, some small—where they can stand in the clarity of plain sunlight through clear glass, simply themselves.

Through the course of a single day the patterns shift as the sun moves over the space. Both the angles of the beams of color and their shapes alter the floor as if it were a mosaic of light that was breathing. Then there are more subtle changes from day to day as the sun goes through the year, which are only noticeable if you suddenly remember what it looked like some months before.

At night, if there is enough moonlight, the colors are strange and cool and the stars show through in the places where the glass is clear.

*Phyllis Birkby practices architecture in Los Angeles and New York and has taught at several architecture schools. She is currently writing a book on the subject of this article.*



# Domestic Interiors in Northern New Mexico

Text and Photos by Jean E. Hess

*"When I entered these homes I always felt embraced by a room, just as I was often embraced by the woman who had invited me inside."*

**N**estled among piñon-dotted hills overlooking ancestral farmlands and the peaceful Rio Chama, the rural village of Los Adobes, New Mexico, confronts a future promising social and cultural change. A forced transition from subsistence agriculture to wage labor in distant cities has left Los Adobes shaken by economic uncertainty and social fragmentation. Women here are very proud of their homes—one refuge in the face of insecurity.

People construct shelters to mediate between themselves and nature and as protection from others. Then they (women, in particular) arrange house interiors to suit everyday life. It is this "everydayness" of house interiors which, in fact, makes them particularly interesting. Yet in the study of dwellings and society, scholars have in the past emphasized the unusual / masculine / monumental / architectural, ignoring the everyday / feminine / vernacular / decorative.<sup>1</sup> Physical architectural space is slow to change, whereas within a house, its "semi-fixed"<sup>2</sup> contents are continually changing.<sup>3</sup> Interior arrangements, the settings for the intricacies of everyday life, signal the wide variety of choices posed for a group experiencing transition; from these choices they select only certain elements for a permanent place in their culture.

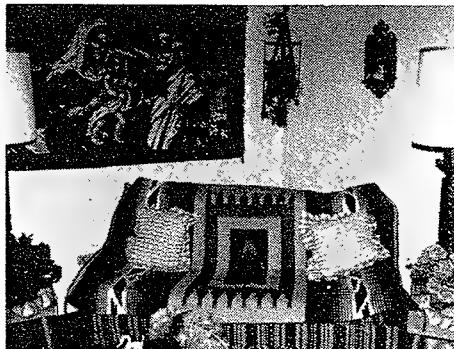
House interiors are a medium through which the women of Los Adobes can express both personal and communally shared ideals. Eight women from this small (population c. 500) Hispanic village shared with me insights about domestic interior arrangement. These insights suggest that house interiors are an important source of cultural information.

The Los Adobes interiors are complex sign systems which transmit a great deal of information about shared norms. It is the women of the village who most skillfully "read" the homes of their neighbors, interpreting the detailed messages transmitted by the artifacts and their arrangement. The women rely on definite aesthetic criteria in arranging their surroundings; their major goal is "beautification." The interiors are both appreciated and criticized by others residing in the home, and by persons within the woman's circle of friends and kin. In fact, many people contribute the objects which are combined to create an interior. Thus a series of social exchanges (decorating ideas, material items) are also involved in creating the final result. In this regard, house interiors are never finished. They are always "becoming." Women add to and subtract from their environments so that the house is a series of transformations over time. Because the house is so mutable, it may

also serve as a barometer of cultural change. Popular themes for house decoration or arrangement are borrowed from the more urban areas of Mexico and the United States. Domestic interiors of rural New Mexico have changed over the years because of this "playing with themes." Thus, women serve as editors and interpreters of cultural change, expressing it tangibly within their homes.

Typically, one woman "speaks" for an interior as the chief choreographer of its arrangement. The influence of others close to her is felt everywhere in fragmentary fashion—specific ideas and artifacts reflect an established pattern of sharing. Thus Cordelia will say, "I don't get ideas from anyone" if she is speaking generally about her whole scheme. But if specific elements are being discussed, their sources, while varied, are actually readily identified.

If more than one adult woman shares a house, compromises must often be made to accommodate the tastes of both. The older woman usually has final say, unless her daughter is the chief breadwinner, in which case the interior arrangement becomes a negotiating process. Younger women in Los Adobes are an active part of the "pool" of workers who travel considerable distances to Santa Fe or Los Alamos in order to earn money. And because



Serape woven by Elsa's cousin. This room shows the layered, symmetrical, and decorative aspects of Los Adobes interior arrangements.



Margaret, in her kitchen, displaying her embroidered tablecloth.



Detail of Margaret's tablecloth.

divorce is becoming as common here as elsewhere in the United States, many local women find that they are alone and responsible for the support of children. Irene supports her mother, Lucia, as well as her own young son. Although they live together in Lucia's home, Lucia has had to acquiesce to a blue color scheme in the living room because Irene sleeps there and blue is her favorite color. In fact, Lucia made the blue afghan for Irene's bed.

Los Adobes homes are rich in the variety of items which fill them. Although local women identified myriad types of interior artifacts, I found that household items are either "iconic" (having a meaning beyond their purpose) or "neutral" (necessities such as couches, carpets, curtains).<sup>4</sup> The icons, which have acquired meanings, can be personal, religious, cultural, gotten through networks of women friends, or specifically decorative in nature. The clue to understanding the layers of meaning that the women place on the house lies in understanding the icons.

Although Los Adobes interiors reflect a strong pattern of sharing among resident women, there are always a few icons which the principal decorator feels reflect her own taste—her "self." They are the things she has purchased selectively, as well as those which she has made. Yet in all cases a woman's taste is mediated. In that sense, icons always reflect, within the home, broader ties of reciprocity within a woman's network of family and friends. Many of the women purchase household objects from kin and friends whose sponsoring companies (Avon and Tupperware, to name two) emphasize sales within personal networks. Others buy items made by friends or family members. The *serape* in Elsa's interior was woven by her cousin in a nearby village. Women also join social groups which gather to make craft objects (ceramics, embroidered or crocheted pieces, weavings). Each item's history includes details of the social context of its purchase or manufacture. A woman

seems always to be influenced by her kin and friends, as well as by commercial industries which produce household decorations or crafts supplies. The ceramic figurine and teepee ashtray were manufactured pieces which Mary painted and then re-fired. Margaret embroidered her elaborate tablecloth following a published design. The influences of U.S. popular culture are quite evident in Los Adobes homes.

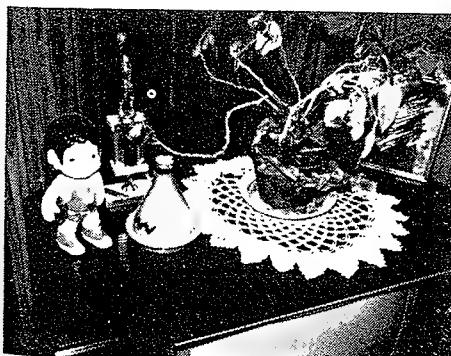
Family heirlooms include portraits of deceased or distant kinfolk, as well as other artifacts handed down through the family network. Lucy treasures a quilt which her mother made years ago. She plans to preserve it by attaching it to a new backing in honor of the hours of thought and labor involved in its manufacture. Gifts from friends and relatives also command a central place in all Los Adobes homes. The items clustered on Elsa's table—a heart-shaped candy box, a votive candle, plants, a miniature grandfather clock—were given to her or her mother on some special occasion.

Icons representing ties to the greater community can also be found in every home. A few of the women keep relics of "old ways"—wool carders, crockery, copper pots, pictures of public buildings. Some of the more durable of these are displayed, the rest being tucked away for safekeeping. In every home there are icons of the Catholic faith shared by all persons born in Los Adobes. Figurines and pictures of various saints, including members of the Holy Family, abound. Each is accompanied by a detailed story of miracles performed. These are heirlooms, gifts, or purchases made on pilgrimages to some important holy place. Several homes provide special niches (*nichos*) to accommodate the sacred treasures. All of these things have a story, weaving threads of communal, familial, and personal history into an intricately meaningful tapestry. Frequently one also encounters a holy figure which "circulates" among the households of those who belong to a society

honoring its name. It is in Theresa's house one week, Rose's house the next, linking their families by its journey around the community.

When Los Adobes women discuss their homes, they emphasize certain aesthetic characteristics of the decorative scheme. Color coordination is a fairly new aesthetic, inspired by home economics courses in the public schools, agricultural extension classes, and women's magazines read by the younger women. Local women typically have a color scheme which they follow for each room. They believe that the "neutral" furnishings (couches, curtains, etc.) should always match. Women carefully plan the purchase of these larger items, leaving little to chance. Against the background of an emphasized color scheme, touches of brighter color are scattered. Small bunches of vivid artificial flowers often punctuate a room, reminders of the delicate *colcha* flowers that in the past were embroidered at random on bright white altar cloths. Today, bright plastic flowers are pinned to the white sheets of home altars on feast days, an innovative mimicry of the traditional *colcha* cloths.<sup>5</sup>

"Brightness" is a word recurring often in the Los Adobes woman's palette of ideas. But an article is "bright" and "shining" only if it is clean. Women devote as much time as possible to dusting, sweeping, and straightening their homes. When they discuss other women in the village, approval might be prefaced by the ultimate compliment a woman can render: "Mary keeps a really clean house." Cleanliness is not merely precautionary—rather, it is part of an aesthetic which directs housekeeping activities. And this particular aesthetic appears to be an established tradition. Women say that their mothers and grandmothers also kept immaculate homes. Cleanliness is a deliberately chosen way of life. Cordelia has often remarked, while visiting my home: "I can understand why you don't keep your house clean."



Manufactured ceramic figurine and teepee ashtray, painted and fired by Mary and arranged on her TV set.



Living room with a *nicho* to accommodate religious objects.



Photographs of family members displayed on the TV set.

You spend your time doing other things. But that's how I like to spend my time. It's just a matter of personal taste."

Purely decorative relationships between various articles within the domestic environment receive quite a lot of attention in Los Adobes. Balancing the smaller, iconic, decorative elements is most crucial. Women often purchase or make decorations in twos or threes so that they can be arranged symmetrically. Mary told me that she arranged two very different plaques on either side of a mirror so her living room wall would be "balanced." Clusters of objects also prevail in every home. These are usually collections of small items displayed within a larger one. For example, I counted nine whatnot shelves in Lucy's living room alone, each one filled with small "pretties." Some of these were purchased especially to fill the shelves. The balancing and clustering of objects seem to help control clutter, imposing order on potential chaos. Several of the local women say they enjoy collecting "pretties"—small decorative items. Cordelia said: "I like all the little pretties. The more there are the better I feel." But she orders them in clusters on shelves and table tops.

Clusters are often bounded on larger flat surfaces by placing them on crocheted doilies or small cloths (*mantelitas*) embellished with embroidery or some other kind of patterning. This also helps to impose order on the interior. Furthermore, doilies and cloths serve to mediate between objects, protecting one object (a table or cabinet) from another (a plant or lamp). The theme of mediation or protection is in turn elaborated into a theme of covering. Lacework may cover whole shelves, small rugs or *serapes* cover furniture which is already upholstered, and a larger carpet is protected by smaller ones, placed where people are most apt to walk.

Process is the most striking feature of Los Adobes homes. Rooms change over time as their contents are rearranged and/

or replaced entirely. Elsa removed two sconces which she had previously balanced with care on either side of her portrait because the wall looked "too busy." Yet she had lived with the arrangement for several years before declaring it unsuitable. Furthermore, she put those sconces in a safe place "in case I need to use them again."

Rose claims that she has to change her house frequently or else she becomes tired of it. First of all, she shifts all of her furniture "just a little" when she cleans; "that way I know it's clean!" In fact, any object in one place for too long seems "dirty" to Rose. In her kitchen she changes curtains and tablecloths frequently. She has six pairs of kitchen curtains. Rose's mother, who has twelve pairs of kitchen curtains, changes hers every week. Rose's husband complains that their dishes and other possessions get broken because she insists on shifting the contents of cupboards as well. But Rose says: "I stay here all day year-round, so I get tired of things. I tell Robert he gets to go other places."

The women change the arrangements in response to the seasonal cycle and the yearly ritual calendar. Rose has special curtains and tablecloths for the Christmas season, and special decorations for Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and Thanksgiving. Cordelia moves her couch and chairs near the window in summer, and to the opposite wall near the heater, in colder weather. And most women display trinkets or plants on their heaters during the warm months, removing them when heat is needed. Other changes occur when company is expected. All of the women have "good" items—doilies, dishes, tablecloths—which are brought out for visitors and stored in some safe place at other times. Elsa and Theresa have also decided to save certain good linens and breakable decorations until their children are older. These are stored in trunks. Later in life they will be proudly displayed. Thus the basic categories of "good" versus "every-

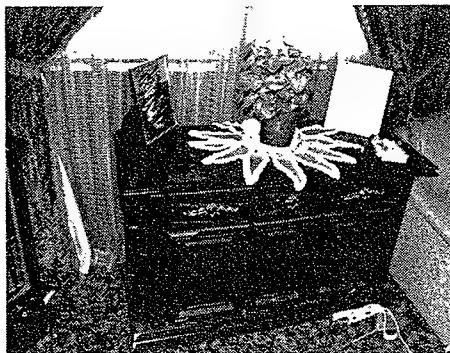
day" items are directly related to the mutable nature of Los Adobes interiors. The everyday acquires a special, ritual component.

#### Editors' Afterword: Housework as Architecture

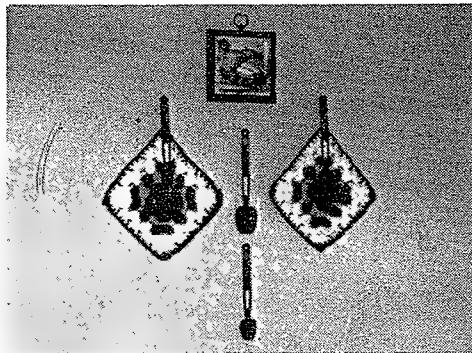
*A conventional view in architecture is that the architect is responsible for the physical construction of the building and, once it is completed, the architect's work is finished. Jean Hess's study offers the view that the cyclical, domestic, ritual housework women have traditionally done is also architecture. It states that making, decorating, and arranging objects within a house is a form of process art and should be studied as that. It then details women's relationships with the objects and the acquired meanings of those objects in their houses in a small town in New Mexico.*

*In Notes on Feminism, Anais Nin poses another interpretation of this type of work:*

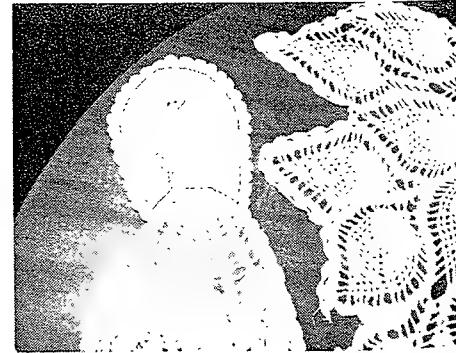
Many of the chores women have accepted were ritualistic: they were means of expressing love and care and protection. We have to find other ways of expressing these devotions. We cannot solve the problem of freeing ourselves of all chores without first understanding why we accomplished them and felt guilty when we did not. We have to persuade those we love that there are other ways of enriching their lives. Part of these occupations were compensatory. The home was our only kingdom, and it returned many pleasures. We were repaid with love and beauty and a sense of accomplishment. If we want our energy and strength to go into other channels, we have to work at a transitional solution which may deprive us of a



Portraits and plants arranged on a chest.



Pot holders, plaques, and spoons symmetrically displayed on a wall.



Lacework.

personal world altogether. But I also think we have to cope with our deep-seated, deeply instilled sense of responsibility. That means finding a more creative way of love and collaboration, of educating our children, or caring for a house, and we have to convince those we love that there are other ways of accomplishing these things.

*We are now working toward many transitional solutions (as this magazine illustrates). As women work outside the home in increasing numbers, there are fewer women who spend most of their energy arranging and rearranging their houses. This study supports these women in their lives and documents their accomplishments as architects of a style that we all recognize in everyday life. The women of Los Adobes are representatives of an unrecognized hidden culture that deserves documentation, or it will be lost as the works of other women artists of the past have been.*

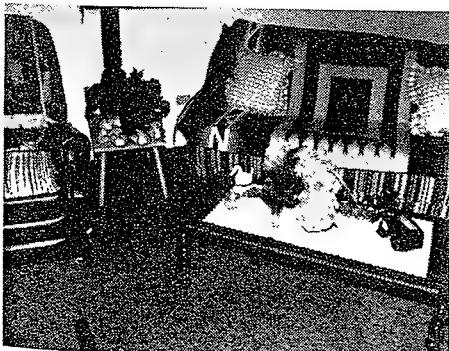
1. Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff ("Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture," *Heresies*, No. 4 [Winter 1978], pp. 38-42), have explored our cultural bias against women's "decorative" art. Domestic things have been dismissed as being of less analytical value to serious scholars than architecture—an arena where men typically prevail (see Elizabeth Weatherford, "Women's Traditional Architecture," *Heresies*, No. 2 [May 1977], pp. 35-39). Those art historians and crit-

ics who have recognized the value of studying domestic material culture have tended to emphasize discrete items such as quilts or paintings which happen to be by women. They have treated these "domestic art" objects as separate from a total household context. Their emphasis on micro-culture may have tended to devalue both the research and the subject. The most recent of such efforts is: C. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell and Marsha MacDowell, *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women* (New York: Dutton, 1979). See also: Patricia Cooper and Norma B. Buford, *The Quilters: Women and Domestic Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), and Beverly Gordon, "The Fiber of Our Lives," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1976), pp. 548-559.

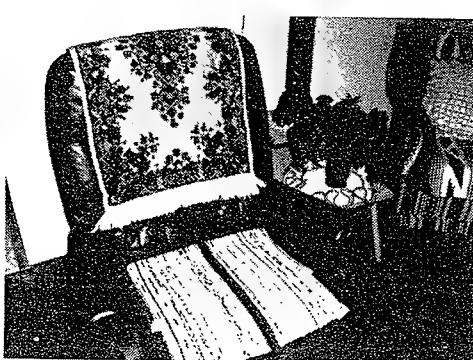
The only exceptions to the rule mentioned above emerge largely from feminist art criticism. Patricia Patterson "Aran Kitchens, Aran Sweaters," *Heresies*, No. 4 [Winter 1978], pp. 89-92) treats domestic interior systems as a "legitimate art form," contrasting kitchen arrangements to the pattern of knitted sweaters. Lucy Lippard ("Making Something from Nothing," *Heresies*, No. 4 [Winter 1978], pp. 62-65) argues in favor of expanding accepted criteria of aesthetic quality to include domestic "hobby" art created by women. Some attempt at considering house interiors as communicative systems has been made by social scientists. The most successful treatment from this camp is by Judith Hansen ("The Proxemics of Danish Daily Life," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, Vol. 3, No. 1 [1976], pp. 52-62).

2. Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), pp. 108-111.
3. Alan Gowans, "Popular Arts and Historic Artifacts: New Principles for Studying History in Art," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1973), pp. 466-483. Here Gowans discusses the differences between "ephemeral" and "permanent" media—media which vary in terms of the degree of rapidity with which they change.
4. The concept of "iconic" versus "neutral" furnishings is my own—Los Adobes women do not verbalize such categories. Yet when they discuss their homes, local women tend to talk at length about those things which have a story. They ignore the more staple items such as couches, rugs, and so forth, after briefly mentioning their cost and the criteria for their selection. That is to say, my field notes, suggest that Los Adobes women distinguish two basic categories of household furnishings even if the distinction is largely unconscious.
5. For a description of traditional *colcha* embroidery in New Mexico, see E. Boyd, *Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974).

*Jean Hess has lived in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico, for the past three years. In addition to studying photography and painting, she has done a doctoral dissertation in anthropology on women in rural Los Adobes.*



Serapes cover the furniture and lacework mediates between the arranged objects and the table.



Armchair with cloths to protect it.



Plants arranged on a heater during the summer. They will be removed in the winter, when the heater is in use.

# Women on the Inside

## Divisions of Space in Imperial China

Nancy Lee Pollock

### A Poem Written on a Floating Red Leaf

How fast this water flows away!  
Buried in the women's quarters,  
The days pass in idleness.  
Red leaf, I order you—  
Go find someone  
in the world of men.<sup>1</sup>

**F**eeling the despair and degradation of her isolated life in the women's compartments of the imperial palace, the 9th-century poet Han Ts'ui-p'in expressed the common plight of most women in feudal China. Deliberately and strictly separated from male society, a woman's view of the outer world was blocked by layers of curtains, screens, partitions, walls, and gates. Li Ch'ing-chao, the great 12th-century poet, described her sense of isolation through a series of architectural images:

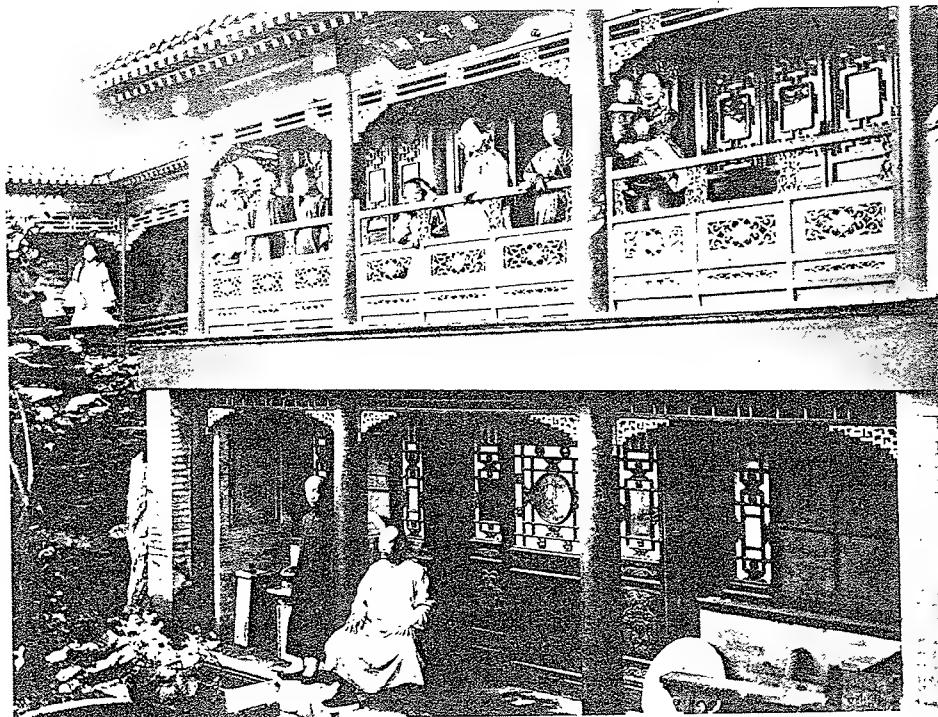
Lonely courtyard, once more slanting  
wind, misty rain, the double-hinged  
door must be shut. . . .

In my pavilion, cold for days with spring  
chill, the curtains are drawn on all  
sides.

I am too weary to lean over the  
balustrade.<sup>2</sup>

Often in poetry by Chinese women, the outer world is obscured from view by confining architecture. Women are hidden behind barriers:

Half of the full moon  
Rises above the vermilion balcony.  
The wind blows down from the emerald  
sky  
A song like a string of pearls.  
But the singer is invisible  
Hidden behind her embroidered  
curtains.<sup>3</sup>



John Thomson. *House of the Official, Yang, Peking, 1871-72*. Courtesy of the Collection of Samuel Wagstaff, New York.

The persistence of tradition in Chinese social structure and architecture is apparent in this 19th-century photograph, which reiterates both the form and message of Spring Morning in the Han Palace (p. 37). The enclosed assembly of women and children on the balconies suggests a life of containment within the house. The balustrade appears as the outer boundary of their world. Only Yang, the official, is unobstructed by architectural elements. While the others look at the camera, he sits like a powerful guardian of his possessions and gazes into his garden, seeming to suggest his connection to the world of action beyond his garden wall.



Wang Shen (1036-1089). *In the Morning Before an Embroidered Dresser*. Fan painting, ink and color on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

Paintings of male scholars in gardens typically included distant mountains or a misty abyss, connecting the scholar with the world beyond, confirming his intellectual power. By contrast, the woman studies her own reflection in a mirror, while behind her a painted landscape reveals the outside world from which she is cut off.

The frequently expressed feeling of invisibility—of being buried deep in the women's quarters—evokes an image of women on the inside looking out, painfully aware of the world of nature as well as men just beyond the garden wall.

While representing confinement and seclusion to these women poets, architectural imagery was used by other poets and painters to reflect and reinforce those societal values that placed women in the inner recesses of the household. Chinese scholars have long acknowledged the symbolic relationship between landscape representation and the virtuous man, whereas the association between architectural enclosure and the ideal woman has only begun to be recognized.<sup>4</sup> As much as the inner room or enclosed courtyard defined the space appropriate to women, it also served as a real and symbolic barrier to their participation in the outer world.

The stratified social order which identified the ideal woman with interior domestic space was first formulated by Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and dominated Chinese society for most of its history.<sup>5</sup> The

basis of Confucian society was the hierarchically organized and well-ordered family. Within the family system, woman was totally and unconditionally inferior to man. The harmony of heaven and earth, according to Confucius, depended on each individual adhering to his or her proper societal role. Involvement by women in affairs outside the domestic sphere was considered improper conduct and was thought to yield negative consequences for the entire society. A poem from the *Book of Songs* (*Shih Ching*), which became a Confucian classic, brands women who participate in male society as the root of countless evils, using architectural imagery:

*Clever men build cities, Clever women topple them.  
Beautiful, these clever women. But they are owls, they are kites.  
Women have long tongues, Stairways to ruin.  
Disorder is not sent down from Heaven, But bred by these women.<sup>6</sup>*

Women, in the Confucian order, were valued for their reproductive function in continuing the husband's family lineage. In fact, the desire for assuring clear parentage of the male line was a prime motivating force for the systematic exclusion of women from male society and their seclusion within the house.

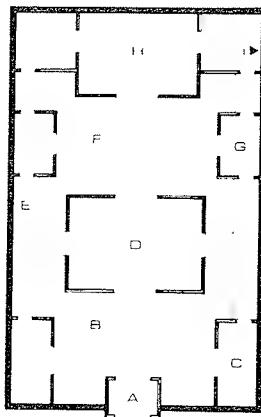
Separation of the sexes was supported by an architectural style with distinct inner and outer apartments for women and men.

*The observances of propriety commence with a careful attention to the relations between husband and wife. They built the mansion and its apartments, distinguishing between the exterior and interior parts. The men occupied the exterior; the women the interior. The mansion was deep, and the doors were strong, guarded by porter and eunuch. The men did not enter the interior; the women did not come out into the exterior.<sup>7</sup>*

In this division of sexual space, interior and exterior are not equal divisions. Rather, the exterior represents access to the entire outer world; the interior means closure and seclusion. In the *Book of Ritual* the separation of sexual spheres extended from the physical division of the house to psychological exclusion.

*The men should not speak of what belongs to the inside of the house, nor the women of what belongs to the outside.... Things spoken inside should not go out, words spoken outside should not come in.<sup>8</sup>*

Thus divisions of domestic architectural space reflect Confucian definitions of the proper relationships between men and women. The plan of the archetypical



Plan of a Chinese House, drawn by Nigel Fennel.

(A) Main Gate, (B) First Courtyard, (C) Corner Room, (D) Main Hall, (E) Connecting Gallery, (F) Inner Courtyard, (G) Side Room, (H) Secondary Building—Living Quarters, (I) Outer Wall.

Chinese house, at least for the middle and upper classes, persisted over centuries with very little variation except for scale and environmental adaptations. Typically, the house was bounded by an exterior wall and consisted of a series of courtyards and buildings placed on a longitudinal axis (ideally north-south), one behind the other. The largest and most important building was usually placed on axis beyond the main gate and first courtyard. The exterior wall often incorporated side rooms or covered arcades. The women's quarters were most often located farthest from the street, along the windowless north or back wall, separated from other buildings by courtyards and accessible only from the inside.

The design of the Chinese house made concrete the extreme isolation of women from life outside advocated by Confucian theorists. The image of the ideal Confucian woman emerges: obedient and subservient to her husband and his parents, producing healthy male offspring, and humbly devoting her energies to the inner household. Identified by her relationship to the architecture which confined her, in Chinese she was called *nei ren*—"the person on the inside."<sup>9</sup>

#### Living on the Inside

In *Lessons for Women* (*Nü-chieh*), Han historian Pan Chao (mid-1st to early 2nd century A.D.), one of the few women to achieve an elevated position in literary and state affairs, described the ancient customs regarding the expected roles of boys and girls.<sup>10</sup> Three days after her birth, a girl is placed on the floor below the bed, indicating that she is lowly and weak and that her primary duty is subservience. She is clothed in swaddling bands and given a potsherd to play with, signifying her

destiny as a laborer. By contrast, the future status of a baby boy is celebrated by cradling him on the bed, clothing him in robes, and giving him a jade sceptre as a toy.<sup>11</sup> The spatial distinctions accorded infants in the ceremonies at childbirth anticipated the future roles of each sex; the dark, confined space under the bed symbolizing the inner women's quarters, with the light, open space upon the bed representing the outside world.

After age seven, boys and girls were given totally different training. Boys were taught literature, poetry, music, mathematics, as well as archery and chariot-driving, in preparation for careers in public life. Girls were educated in the arts of pleasing speech and manners and trained to be docile and obedient. They learned to handle hempen fibers, to deal with cocoons, and to weave silk; by age ten girls ceased to go out from the women's quarters.<sup>12</sup>

An early voice of outrage against the injustice of the family system was the scholar-official Fu Hsuan (217-278). In the first part of a long poem he wrote:

*Bitter indeed it is to be born a woman,  
It is difficult to imagine anything so low!  
Boys can stand openly at the front gate,  
They are treated like gods as soon as they are born.  
Their manly spirit bounded only by  
the Four Seas,  
Ten thousand miles they go, braving  
storm and dust.  
But a girl is reared without joy or love,  
And no one in her family really cares  
for her.  
Grown up, she has to hide in the inner  
rooms,  
Cover her head, be afraid to look others  
in the face.  
And no one sheds a tear when she is  
married off.  
All ties with her own kin are abruptly  
severed.<sup>13</sup>*

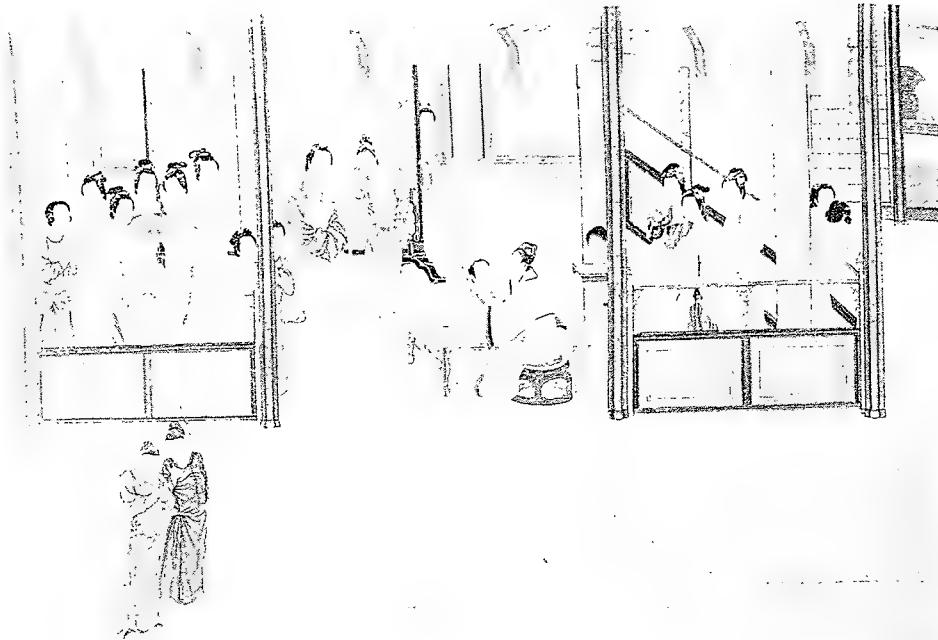
From the consolidation of Confucianism as a state religion during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) into the 20th century, the pattern of life for women remained virtually unchanged, although there were more or less oppressive periods. Confucian theory permeated all classes of Chinese society, including the peasantry. In the Confucian model, labor was divided along sexual lines. Women handled textile production, from cultivation of silkworms to weaving intricate patterns in silk. Peasant men generally worked at agricultural production, although a great many women also labored in the fields. Most literary and visual images of lower-class women portrayed idealizations of their economic function in the Confucian social order. The deprivation and humiliation facing poor women

were not generally recognized. Ch'ien T'ao (early 11th century), a concubine of a Sung dynasty prime minister, affords a rare description in her biting comment, "Written at a Party Where My Lord Gave Away a Thousand Bolts of Silk":

*A bolt of silk for each clear toned song.  
Still these beauties do not think it is  
enough,  
Little do they know of a weaving girl.  
Sitting cold by her window,  
Endlessly throwing her shuttle to and  
fro.<sup>14</sup>*

The necessary economic role of lower-class women sometimes gave them greater mobility than their upper-class counterparts, but in the rigid hierarchical system which held all women in servitude, poor women were most certainly at the bottom of the social structure.

The designs of lower-class houses were organized for nuclear or small extended families without the elaborate sexual segregation found in the homes of the wealthy. Polygamy and the large inner quarters it necessitated were, however, cultural aspirations for all. In upper-class aristocratic and imperial households, wealth and status were measured by the size of the women's compartments and the number of women acquired for the pleasure of the male head of the household. Each woman had her appointed place in the household hierarchy. The First Lady, who was principal wife of the father or of the eldest son, managed the household routine, the education of young children, the servants, and ancestral sacrifices.



Chiu Ying (c. 1510-1551), *Spring Morning in the Han Palace*. Section of handscroll, ink and color on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

*This long handscroll begins at the outer gate of the imperial palace, proceeding through layers of walls, balustrades, and courtyards, to an inner series of compounds—the women's quarters. Architecture encloses the palace women. Many are partially hidden behind pillars or screens. The women are almost all identical. Their images are fragile and flat; their stares, vacant. The lack of dimensionality and space between figures conveys an image of woman devoid of personality and intellectual depth. With the power to claim personal space denied, there is no self. Cloistered together, their chastity guarded by ever-present eunuchs, these women are sexual symbols of the wealth and power of the emperor.*

Under her were the other principal wives, the secondary wives, the concubines, and finally the maids, each answering to the next highest rank.

The plan of the imperial palace was a much-enlarged version of the same vertical organization. Within the women's compartments of the imperial palace, the emperor could have one empress and over one hundred concubines, plus female palace attendants, musicians, and dancers, all of whom were at his disposal sexually.<sup>15</sup> The empress and imperial concubines came from noble families and were often well-educated. The thousands of lower-ranking women usually came from poor families and were generally illiterate. Those few women in his favor would have occasional sexual encounters with the emperor. But often, for their entire lifetimes, women of the palace saw only eunuchs and small boys, resulting in what must have been a life of loneliness and sexual deprivation.

The women in these households worked, ate, and slept together, relaxed and played games together. In the best situations they had sympathetic and supportive relationships with each other. Li Ch'ing-chao (1084-1151) wrote longingly of friendly competition among women at the palace. She ends a poem with a bitter-

sweet evocation of the transiency of beauty and the loneliness of old age for women no longer attractive to men, women who hide themselves behind barriers:

*I remember the happy days in the lost  
capital.  
We took our ease in the women's quarters.  
The Feast of Lights was elaborately  
celebrated—  
Golden jewelry, brocaded girdles,  
New sashes, we competed  
To see who was most smartly dressed.  
Now I am withering away,  
Wind blown hair, frosty temples.  
I am embarrassed to go out this evening.  
I prefer to stay beyond the curtains,  
And listen to talk and laughter  
I can no longer share.<sup>16</sup>*

The degree of freedom and participation in the world outside the house varied considerably from dynasty to dynasty. The T'ang dynasty (618-906) was a high period in creativity, relative mobility, and political involvement for Chinese women. It was followed by their severe repression under the influence of neo-Confucianism.<sup>17</sup> The practice of binding women's feet began in the 10th century, shortly before the establishment of the Sung dynasty (960-1280), and persisted well into the 20th century.<sup>18</sup> Even more dras-



Chin T'ing-piao (18th century), *Ts'ao Ta-ku Writing the "Han Documents."* Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

*Despite the fact that Pan Chao (Ts'ao Ta-ku) worked on the histories in the imperial library and conferred on state affairs, the artist chose to portray the historian in a confined environment in which women and children are segregated from the outer world. Although she had gained recognition in male society, Pan Chao did not expect her daughters to do the same. She wrote Lessons for Women for them, advocating traditional and separate training for women.*

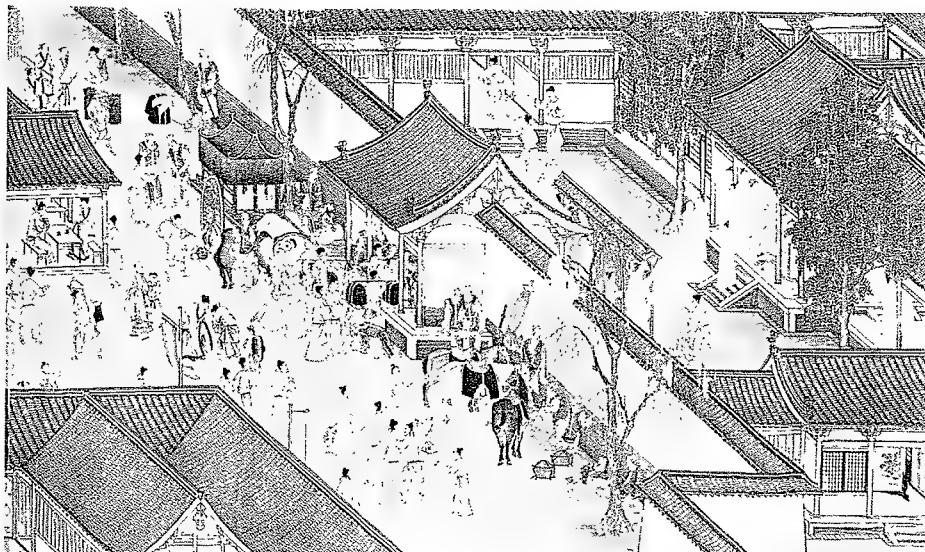
tically than architectural barriers, bound feet restricted women's movements and confined them within the interior recesses of the house. Like the images of domestic architecture, bound feet came to represent ideal womanly modesty and obedience.

Much has been made of bound feet as an erotic enticement, but far more significant were the socially repressive aspects of foot-binding. The decline in the status of women in the Sung dynasty coincided with increased urbanization in China. The new concentration of upper classes in cities, where the work of women was less essential than on country estates, further devalued women in upper-class society. The institution of concubinage grew rapidly. The crippling effect of bound feet emphasized the economic uselessness of women while promoting the status of the man wealthy enough to keep such obviously useless, hobbled women. More than ever before, women were reduced to being the property and baubles of men.

Painters and poets have created images of women in the interior space of the household, defined by and identified with confining architectural elements. For the women poets on the inside attempting to look out, architectural barriers were cultural symbols of their loss of mobility and individuality, of their being bound to the home and a limited sphere of activity. For

male artists on the outside, those same architectural elements were the setting for the ideal subservient, humble, obedient woman who knew her place within the highly stratified Confucian model. Out of both interior and exterior views, a baffling and painful image emerges—the migratory bird, pushed out of her own nest and then caged in another. Never at home in the house in which she is born because she is bred to be sent away, never at home in the man's house where she is sent, she is one among many anonymous women who have been cut off from their families and the outside world. All the women in the inner quarters are strangers, hidden, invisible. The fine interior rooms and garden walls of the patriarchal households, so beautifully rendered in Chinese paintings, meant containment, exclusion, and isolation for women of that society.

1. Han Ts'ui-p'in (9th century). From *The Orchid Boat: Women Poets of China*, translated and edited by Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung, p. 24. English translation copyright © 1972 by Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung. Used by permission of The Seabury Press, Inc.
2. Translated by E. Eoyang, in Wu-chi Liu and Irving Tucheng Lo, *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry* (New York: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1975), p. 368.
3. Sun Tao-hsuan (12th century). Translated in Rexroth and Chung, p. 51. Used by permission of The Seabury Press, Inc.
4. Such a relationship has been suggested in an excellent pioneering work on the representation of women by Dr. Esther Jacobson-Leong, "Social Order and the Definition of Beauty: The Case of the Woman in Early Chinese Painting" (unpublished manuscript).
5. Confucius wrote: "Women and people of lowly station are difficult to deal with. If one is too friendly with them they become obstreperous, and if one keeps them at a distance, they become resentful." See Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (London, 1949), Book XVII.
6. Song #264, translated in Burton Watson, *Early Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962, p. 226).
7. *Li Chi*, Book X, Sect. II, 13; translated by James Legge in *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism*, Part III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), p. 479.
8. *Li Chi*, Book X, Sect. I, 12; Legge, pp. 454-455.
9. R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), p. 45. Another possible translation is "person who is within."
10. Nancy Lee Swann, Pan Chao, *Foremost Woman Scholar of China* (London: Century, 1932), p. 83.
11. The customs are described in the *Book of Songs* (Shih Ching), one of the Confucian classics. Translated in Van Gulik, pp. 15-16.
12. *Li Chi*, Book X, Sect. II, 32-33; Legge, p. 479. Compiled ca. 1st century B.C.
13. Translated in Van Gulik, pp. 111-112.
14. Translated in Rexroth and Chung, p. 34.
15. Van Gulik, pp. 180-192, *passim*.
16. Translated in Rexroth and Chung, p. 42.
17. T'ang women were among the greatest women poets; they danced and rode horseback. In T'ang painting, women were depicted with more vitality and personal space, despite artistic conventions, than in any other period. See, for example, the works of artist Chou Fang and the recently excavated T'ang tomb murals in the tomb of Li Hsien.
18. At age five, a girl's feet were compressed by wrapping them with tight bands, bending back the big toe and folding the four other toes against the sole of the foot. Gradually increased pressure bent the arch into the permanently deformed hooflike tiny foot, with the resultant swollen ankle hidden by leggings. For a discussion of the practice of footbinding, see Van Gulik, pp. 216-222; and Howard Levy, *Chinese Footbinding: The History of a Curious Erotic Custom* (New York: Walton Rawls, 1966).



Anonymous (ca. late 14th century), copy after anonymous Academy painter (ca. 1140). *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute* (Episode 18: *Wen-chi Returns Home*). Handscroll, ink, color, and gold on silk. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Dillon Fund, 1973.  
That the spatial divisions of Chinese domestic architecture reflected societal organization is evident in this depiction of Lady Wen-chi's return to China after 12 years of captivity in Mongolia in the 2nd century A.D. The public street is the domain of men—merchants, peasants, priests, and scholars. Within the great house, contact with the public is limited to the outer courtyard, the link between interior and exterior environments. Wen-chi and her serving women arrive at the first covered verandah to be greeted by women of the household who have waited there. The women's space occupies the deeper recesses of the house. This handscroll illustrates the architectural ideal, which layered spaces from public to private and delineated the separate domains of the sexes.

# Housing Histories

## A Way of Understanding the Social and Personal Meaning of the Domestic Environment

Anna Rubbo

Houses, like so many aspects of our modern society, have become commodities, objects to be negotiated and profited from. For those of us involved in architecture—either as practitioners or as designers—they are often reduced to aesthetic expressions. Yet houses are much more than commodities or bearers of architectural style; they can also be seen as "texts" or "stories" through which social and personal meaning emerge. The study of houses can tell us about relations between men and women, classes and races, and the past to the present. Through their organic connection to life, houses reveal the continuous interplay between the personal world and society. Just as we move through stages in life, relationships, and jobs, we move through environments (or perceive or arrange environments in a new way). Clearly, a "life history" and a "housing history" are linked. The value of a housing history is that by documenting or re-creating a psychosocial/spatial history, we can better understand the meaning of the domestic environment. While all this may seem rather obvious, it is an intriguing avenue for research about women, who have traditionally been so tied to domestic space.

In order to illustrate the possibilities of and architectural insights from a housing history, I wish to draw on my study of housing and settlement patterns in Colombia, South America.<sup>1</sup> The two texts or "stories" are particularly revealing about the impact of development on women in Latin America. They show the contrasting ways in which two women—one a peasant, the other a day-laborer—responded to the "development" of their local society.

### The Setting

The Cauca Valley in Colombia is an immensely fertile valley nestled between the central and eastern *cordilleras* of the Andes. Cali is the primary city. In recent years the southern part of the valley has followed a "development" scenario typical for many rural areas of the Third World—the transformation of land use from small-scale peasant farming based on agricultural diversification to large-scale monocropping or agribusiness. The area is inhabited by Black descendants of slaves, who were brought to Colombia to

work in the gold mines and haciendas of the Spanish. When the slaves were freed in the mid-19th century they settled as peasant farmers and developed a semi-subsistence agriculture. They lived in extended families in clusters of houses around a common patio. Frequently these households had female heads, and women were landowners and farmers. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that this was a matrifocal society.

As the farm land was bought up by plantations in recent decades, these dispersed settlements disappeared and the families moved into the rural town of Puerto Tejada. Previously, the town had been a prosperous market center for peasant produce, but it soon became a company town, housing workers from far and near. The population grew rapidly and housing demand exceeded supply. With a shortage of housing, inadequate sanitation, and no clean water supply, the town became a rural slum. Even so, its bustling vitality has always attracted local peasants and migrants from other parts of Colombia.

Sugar cane is the primary crop in the Cauca Valley today. As is often the case,

men are generally preferred as regular workers by the plantations. The chief source of employment for women is day-laboring. Their pay is lower than that of regular workers and their incomes unstable. For women who traditionally have borne the responsibility for raising their families, the impact of such a labor structure is obvious.<sup>2</sup>

### Señora Mina

Sra. Mina lives on her farm. She is 80 years old and the mother of 12 children, all of whom are living. The farm is not big enough to support her now very extensive family; and most of them live in the nearby town. At present two daughters and their families live with her.

Sra. Mina came to the area in 1922 with her first *compañero*; they built a house on the same site where she now lives. This first house was a two-room structure of wattle and daublike construction, with a detached kitchen. In 1932 she met her second husband, and they expanded the house to accommodate a growing family. In 1950 a married daughter built herself a house, where she lived until she separated from her husband. The husband stayed and she returned to the town. Later this daughter sold the house to a younger brother, who brought his wife to live there. Another of Sra. Mina's sons built himself a house in 1961, which he demolished six years later in order to use the materials on a house he was building in town. In 1965 the maternal house was substantially rebuilt because the family wanted a new house in which to celebrate a wedding. Like all the past construction, this house was built collectively by kinsmen, using thatch and bamboo from the farm. Sra. Mina provided food and drink for all those who helped.

Sra. Mina spends many of her daytime hours under the verandah, or in the *corredor*, as it is called. There she does her household chores and minds the young children while her daughters work on the farm. The *corredor* faces the patio and as neighbors pass through this semi-public space she engages them in conversation. She has a great affection for the landscape and for the trees which have given her a living. When the government agronomists came by, telling peasants they should replace their perennial coffee and coco trees

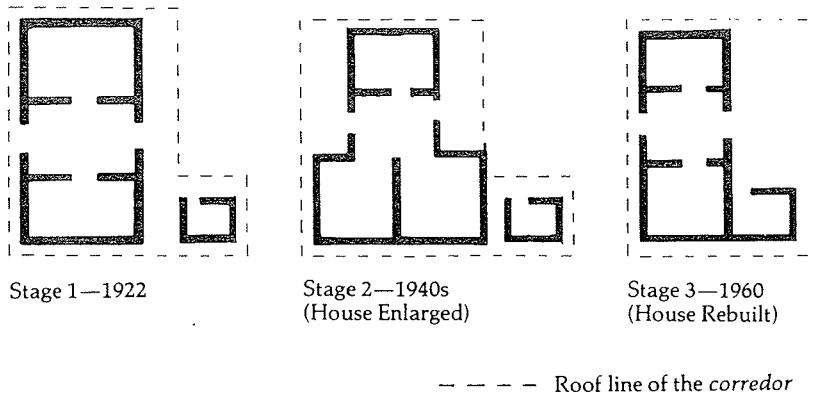


Woman day-laborer in cane field.

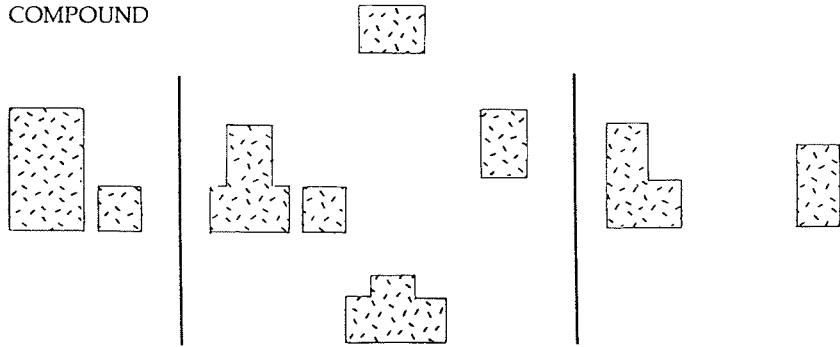


Female-headed extended family in front of their rural house (note the *corredor*).

#### HOUSE



#### COMPOUND



Expansion and contraction of a rural home in accordance with the family's developmental cycle.

with "green revolution" crops such as soybeans or tomatoes, Sra. Mina resisted the idea vehemently.

Over the years her children and their offspring have often returned to live on the farm for periods of time. This has usually happened in times of emergency. In the case of one son, he became indebted after buying a sewing machine for his wife and fell behind with the rent. So he and his family returned to the farm for a year. In this way the farm has provided a safe refuge for family members.

Permanence, evolution, and positive attitudes characterize Sra. Mina's housing history. Sra. Rojo's is quite different.

#### Señora Rojo

Sra. Rojo is 38 years old. Born in the jungles of the Pacific Coast, she lived in the same house throughout her childhood; her family still lives there. At 18 she went to the Cauca Valley and found a job as a domestic servant in Cali. There she met her *compañero*, and in the time they were together she had 10 pregnancies. Only five children survived and she almost died on two occasions. The second time she nearly bled to death while lying in the dark in her rented room.

Sra. Rojo has worked intermittently as a day-laborer; her *compañero* works as a regular employee in the canefields. Several years ago he left her for another woman, but he continued to provide the family with some basic necessities. Not strong enough to work in the fields every day, Sra. Rojo felt her poverty keenly. There was not enough food for the children. In desperation she sent a letter to a charitable radio program, requesting that they find jobs as domestic servants for her nine- and eleven-year-old daughters. She is illiterate and had someone write the following letter:

*I am a very poor woman. . . . My husband left me with five children. The owner of the house came on Sunday and insulted me very badly because I owe her four months' rent. Two hundred pesos. A sick woman like me cannot work. My husband left when my last child was born and he doesn't send enough food. I don't have anywhere to sleep. I am in the street with my children.*

Perhaps as a result of many years of poverty, Sra. Rojo goes "mad" periodically. She wanders in the street sadly, talking to herself about life on the coast. A year ago her *compañero* secured a loan, and with some help from her oldest son, they bought a two-room house. It had no electricity, water, or sewerage, and it was subject to flooding. Sra. Rojo, however, was delighted with "her" house; she even bought some piglets to raise. But despite her new-found security, she still suffers

from occasional madness. During these times she becomes obsessed with her childhood home where, in her memory, harmony existed and food and land were plentiful.

Sra. Rojo's oldest son recalls the number of times they moved. Before coming to Puerto Tejada they lived in 10 different rented rooms in the north of the valley. In their 10 years in the town they moved 13 times. Sometimes they fell behind with the rent; other times there were problems with neighbors or landlords. With one house they rented near the canefields, the owner stripped the roof tiles from the house while Sra. Rojo was at work, because she owed two months' rent. In 18 years the family moved 23 times; rarely did they have more than one room and they shared kitchen facilities. More often than not the houses in which they rented rooms had no running water, and sometimes not even a latrine.

These two histories dramatically illustrate the environmental conditions of peasant and modern life. Both women are poor. Yet throughout a 50-year period there has been a close correspondence between architectural space and the physical, social, and psychological needs of Sra. Mina and her family. As the family grew or contracted, so buildings were added or taken away. As social events occurred (the wedding, for example), buildings were refurbished or modified. Sra. Mina's sense of well-being is intimately and consciously tied to her environment—to her house and the surrounding landscape—and the social relations they allow. For her children the family farm has been a safe retreat in hard times.

Apart from her childhood home, and more recently her new house, Sra. Rojo has had little environmental stability. That she craved it is demonstrated in her delight with her own house. That she suf-



Women in front of rented urban home.

fered from a lack of it is perhaps reflected in part in her madness. Unlike Sra. Mina, Sra. Rojo could not expand her space as her family grew. Many of her environments were hostile. They were often damp or dark and lacked services. Frequently she had personal problems with neighbors, and she constantly had financial problems with landlords.

Why are these histories important to architects and feminists? Perhaps the most significant thing about them is that they let us enter another world in a way that is usually impossible and document lives that would be lost to history. They link social change, changes in lives, and relationships to the environment. They also show the relationship of hardship and poverty to psychological perceptions of the environment, which embodies those difficulties. The impact of development is personally documented. They give us a glimpse into a lived reality which most research techniques (especially the quantitative survey type so commonly used in housing studies) cannot.

If we were planners or architects in a developing country, histories such as these might indicate ways in which development could be less dehumanizing. They could also suggest strategies for the more equal integration of women into modernizing societies.<sup>3</sup>

Whether the housing history can serve a useful function for us remains to be seen. Understanding our most intimate environments as texts or stories into which social and personal meaning are interwoven might simply be an interesting voyage. On the other hand, it might lead to new ways of ordering and designing domestic space.



Three generations: Sra. Mina with her daughter and granddaughter.

I would like to thank Michael Taussig for his helpful comments. Photos by Anna Rubbo and Michael Taussig.

1. Anna Rubbo, *Housing as a Medium for Cultural and Political Change: Architecture and Capitalist Development in a Colombian Agribusiness Zone* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1979).
2. For a more extended discussion of family structure and the impact of development on women, see Anna Rubbo, "The Spread of Capitalism in Rural Colombia: Effects on Poor Women" in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). See also Anna Rubbo and Michael Taussig, "Up off Their Knees: Servanthood in Western Colombia," *Michigan Discussions in Anthropology* (Spring 1978).
3. In recent years numerous development projects have been directed at women. In her book *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies* (London: Kegan Paul, 1980), Barbara Rogers argues that many of these special projects impose Western sex-role stereotypes on the women and ignore the historically important economic role of women, especially in agricultural production. She contends that these projects, focusing on the home, children, crafts, etc., effectively relegate women to a "domestic ghetto." She insists on the need to know women's "real situation" and for that to inform planning.

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# Kitchen Dramas

Nan Bauer Maglin

I reached under the kitchen table for a brown paper bag full of embroidery which asked God to Bless Our Home. . . . I kindled a fresh pot of coffee. I scrubbed cups and harassed Pallid [her ex-husband] into opening a jar of damson-plum jam. . . . I made the beds and put the aluminum cot away. . . . I did the dishes and organized the greedy day; dinosaurs in the morning, park in the afternoon, peanut butter in between, and at the end of it all, to reward us for a week of beans endured, a noble rib roast with little onions, dumplings, and pink applesauce.<sup>1</sup>

tory is architectural—the selling of the ideal of the private, detached house with rooms for separate activities presided over by different family members. The proselytization of the ideal home and women's role as housekeeper was aimed at all classes. Through institutions such as settlement houses, charity organizations, and schools, middle-class women trained poorer women in domestic science techniques and ideology. The intent was to get women and children off the streets and out of each other's homes into their own kitchens—kitchens designed with new technology and endowed with emotional meaning and moralism.<sup>3</sup>

Dorothy Canfield's novel *The Home-Maker*, written in the early 20th century, describes how a woman's sensibilities were shaped into obsessing about and within four walls. The heroine, Evangeline Knapp, practices Christine Frederick's prescriptions for scientific management in the home. Evangeline admires the advertising in the local paper:

*This morning, for instance, as Evangeline sipped her coffee, she enjoyed to the last word the account of the new kitchen-cabinets at the Emporium, and Mrs. Willing's little story about the wonderful way in which American ingenuity had developed kitchen conveniences! Good patriotism, that was, too. She knew that all over town women were enjoying it with their breakfast and would look around their own kitchens to see how they could be improved. The kitchenware department would have a good day.<sup>4</sup>*

I would like to examine the kitchen not only as a metaphor and image of women's condition but also as an aspect of social history.<sup>5</sup> Immigrant and ethnic literature can add to a class, cultural, and historical perspective on the ideology of domesticity. I seek to offer a collage of American women's 20th-century literature that depicts the power of the kitchen in women's lives. The kitchen is simultaneously a prison of drudgery, a place for mother-daughter conflict, a space for dreams, and a setting for intense connections among women from which blooms a special female culture.

**T**his is Faith talking, a white, Jewish, somewhat middle-class New York City mother of the 1950s, a narrator of Grace Paley's stories—stories Faith rightly calls "kitchen dramas." Kitchen drama is a good term to describe much literature written by women. It clearly names the home, specifically the kitchen, as the locus of meaning and emotion in the lives of women. The obsessive identity of women with interiors is lodged in the history of the word "housewife"—wife of the house. Anne Sexton's poem "Housewife" portrays this fusion:

Some women marry houses  
It's another kind of skin; it has a heart  
a mouth a liver and bowel movements  
The walls are permanent and pink  
See how she sits on her knees all day  
faithfully washing herself down. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The notion that women are somehow born with kitchens as well as wombs, the insistence that "by nature" women are oriented to interior space is not natural but cultural. The development of this pervasive cultural image is tied up in the privatization of women's lives, the separation of work from the home during the complex events of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration in the United States after the Civil War. One part of this his-

## I. Kitchen Mothers and the Struggle of the Daughters

Daughters often remember their mothers by picturing them in the kitchen. That memory is laced with guilt and/or anger; it is never wholeheartedly warm. The vision can be of the mother working incessantly in the kitchen—the exhausted, nervous, paralyzed mother being destroyed by the kitchen. The vision can also be of the mother as the kitchen. When Elizabeth G. Stern recalls her mother in the autobiographical book *My Mother and I*, the memory is mixed with guilt and sadness at how hard her mother worked, as well as a feeling of having been imprisoned by her kitchen mother:

*I can never remember my mother in my childhood in any other than one of two positions, standing at the stove cooking, or sitting in the corner; her foot rocking the cradle, and her hands stitching, stitching. Mother eked out the family income by making aprons—by hand! . . . On rare occasions when mother was obliged to leave the house she would tie Fanny to one leg of the table, and me to the other.<sup>6</sup>*

For Elizabeth Stern's family and many other immigrant families living in urban ghettos in the early 1900s, the dwelling unit consisted of one room—a kitchen. The Sterns lived in a wet cellar room, partitioned off and rented to many families. Elizabeth's mother, father, and two sisters lived amid the gas stove and a small assortment of furniture. When families had more than one room, women spent all of their time in the kitchen, for it was the only place that was heated by a coal or wood stove. In the kitchen the working-class woman cooked, washed, and ironed—hard, endless work. It was also in the tenement kitchen that immigrant women and their children did "home work" such as garment finishing, flower and feather making, and similar piecework in order to support the family.<sup>7</sup>

The image of the mother as a toiler in the kitchen is a recurrent theme in many novels and recollections. Polish-American poet Esta Seaton writes of her Aunt Reba:

*she was nervous;  
Always scrubbing the walls.  
Scrubbing and scrubbing so  
the walls would shine<sup>8</sup>*



New York tenement kitchen, circa 1905. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Community Service Society Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

In Francine Krasno's recent story "Celia," she remembers an angry, crazy, confined mother:

*My earliest memories are of her watching helplessly as my father spanked me for dancing around the kitchen table. She yelled at us during the day when he was gone.... She refused to clean the house, cooked for us grudgingly.... I remember meals when I choked on resentment, eating her misery.... My monster mother. I longed for the perfect TV Donna Reed mother who handed her children bagged lunches as she kissed them goodbye and waved them out the door.<sup>9</sup>*

The rebellion of daughters against their mothers and their kitchens is another theme, poignantly illustrated in *Brown-Girl, Brownstones* by Paula Marshall. Selina, a Barbadian-American teenager growing up in Brooklyn in the 1930s, knows her mother Silla only as a kitchen mother who scrubs other women's floors for a "few raw-mouth pennies" in order to realize her dream of buying a brownstone. Selina, wanting freedom, begins her rebellion by making love to an older bohemian man, who ironically lives in a kitchen:

*As he gently unbuttoned her coat and sweater, while hands and mouth discovered her slight breasts and tiny nipples formed under his lips, one part of Selina thought of her mother. She might be awaiting her in the kitchen, the angry words building up inside her.<sup>10</sup>*

Rachel, in Anzia Yezierska's story "Children of Loneliness," reenacts this

struggle between the mother who is identified with the kitchen and the daughter who rejects the kitchen. Rachel returns from college to her Lower East Side home. She insists on the use of a knife and fork and is disgusted by her mother's "fried, greasy stuff." To her mother, this rejection of food represents a rejection of an offering from her kitchen-self:

*"How I was hurrying to run by the butcher before everybody else, so as to pick out the grandest, fattest piece of brust!" she wailed, tears streaming down her face. "And I put my hand away from my heart and put a whole fresh egg into the lotkes, and I stuffed the stove full of coal like a millionaire so as to get the lotkes fried so nice and brown; and now you give a kick on everything I done...."<sup>11</sup>*

Rachel leaves the dinner table and her parent's house in a rage. Two weeks later she returns to the tenement roof at the air-shaft opposite their kitchen window to sort out her feelings. Again she is repulsed by the "terrible dirt":

*Ach! what sickening disorder! In the sink were the dirty dishes stacked high, untouched, it looked, for days. The table still held the remains of the last meal. Clothes were strewn about the chairs. The bureau drawers were open, and their contents brimmed over in mad confusion.<sup>12</sup>*

Rachel feels both guilt and sadness at the sight of her aging, withering mother. Nevertheless, aware that she will be lonely, Rachel decides never to enter the kitchen again.

The struggle of mothers and daughters is the conflict between the dreams of the young for choice and the reality of woman's position in society. Selina, in *Brown-Girl, Brownstones*, wants to repeat a journey her own mother had made but now appears to have forgotten:

*Remember how you used to talk about how you left home and came here alone as a girl of 18 and was your own woman. I used to love hearing that. And that's what I want. I want it!<sup>13</sup>*

The conflict is between two generations and represents the tension about role definition and self-concept that is lodged in the place of the kitchen. The mother, kitchen-bound, is blamed for female confinement by the daughter who looks beyond the home to work, to school, to the mainstream culture, to be on her own, outside. The daughter has no sense of the historical and sociopsychological processes that put them both in the same position. She does not see men as the real keepers of the keys. The daughter merely wants to get out, with the escape varying according to class, culture, place and time. Getting out of the house does not always mean freedom: it could mean the streets, it could mean working in another woman's kitchen, or it could mean having one's own kitchen to be wife and mother in.<sup>14</sup>

## II. Kitchen Dreams

Women in both fictional and nonfictional accounts seem inevitably to exist in the "private sphere"—the home. It is ironic since many women left home for a new country and worked outside the home. They all seem to have a dream for a better life that is translated into a physical space: a white kitchen, a new bedroom set, a living room for company. The dream of a better home is not to be denigrated, for mothers and daughters from immigrant, working-class, Black, and Hispanic backgrounds did and do live in mean circumstances.

Pregnant at 15, Alice, in Nicholasa Mohr's contemporary novella about Puerto Rican life in the Bronx, dreams about getting out of the small room she shares with her sister and away from arguments in the kitchen with her mother. A neighbor, Herman, a gay 40-year-old Puerto Rican man, finds her weeping in the hallway and takes her into his apartment. The apartment is "nice and new and clean" with the "same bedroom set down on Third Avenue in the window of Hearn's Department Store."<sup>15</sup> Alice marries Herman because he cares about her but also to fulfill a wish she has nurtured since her first visit to his apartment. "She slept in the beautiful bedroom in the comfortable bedroom."<sup>16</sup>



A New York working girl's home, circa 1897. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.

Elizabeth Stern writes of the tension created between mother and daughter by the "miracle" of the American home. Stern, while going to school outside the ghetto in the early 1900s, discovers the living room:

*On a visit to a teacher I was taken into a room devoted not to eating, nor sleeping, nor cooking. In this room were pictures, bric-a-brac, books. There was a piano. It was a room, they said, set apart simply to 'sitting.' The room was a living room. I tried to understand what it would mean to have such a room. I could not imagine people coming to sit in a house without working while they sat. It made 'living' a special, separate thing.<sup>17</sup>*

Like Elizabeth, Adele Linder (*The Arrogant Beggar*, 1927) wants a real home, that is, one with "white curtains, red and green geraniums," unlike the Essex Street home of Mrs. Greenberg, where she lodges. This image of the clean white room with geraniums is pervasive in the literature and was sold to young women through schools, media, and institutions masquerading as homes. Adele finds her answer in a newspaper story about a Home for Working Girls, to which she eventually moves:

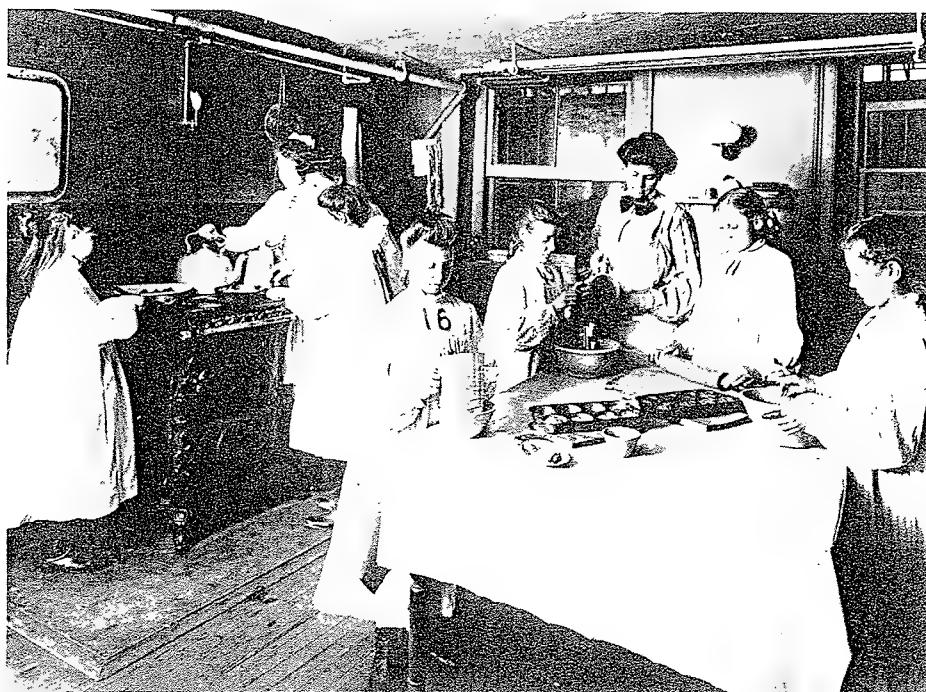
*Here was a real home. A place where a girl had a right to breathe and move around like a free human being. Everything I longed for and dreamed of at Mrs. Greenberg's was here. Light, air, space, enough room to hang my clothes. Even a bureau with a mirror to see myself as I dressed. But more than a mirror, the space to move around... I wanted to meet that warmhearted spirit of love who thought it all out: Mrs. Hellman, the Friend of the Working Girl.<sup>18</sup>*

Like the Home for Working Girls, the settlement house preached the right and better way of living to tired, frazzled

tenement to be, nonetheless, more of a home.

Settlements directed most of their efforts toward the children, who proved, on the whole, to be more teachable than the mothers. Hannah Breineh, a character in many of Yezierska's stories, exemplifies the ghetto mother who reacts against the middle-class home. When her children become successful, Hannah moves in with her daughter Fanny, leaving her Lower East Side kitchen where everybody "in her household cooked and washed in the same kitchen, and everybody knew what everybody else ate and what everybody else wore down to the number of patches in their underwear."<sup>20</sup> But Hannah is not comfortable in the kitchen of the 84th Street brownstone with its "glistening porcelain sink and the aluminum pots and pans that shone like silver." She can only "breathe like a free person...when the girl has her day out," for both the servant and her children disdain her manners. Embarrassed by this "push-cart mother," Fanny finally moves her mother to a fancy Riverside Drive apartment with a small kitchenette and dining service in the building.

*[Hannah] deprived of her kitchen...felt robbed of the last reason for her existence. Cooking and marketing and putting busily around with pots and pans gave her an excuse for living and struggling and bearing up with her children. The lonely idleness of Riverside Drive...gave her that choked sense of being cut off from air, from life, from everything warm and human.<sup>21</sup>*



Cooking class at Christ Church Memorial House, 344 West 36th Street, 1905. Photographer: Byron. Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.

For Lutie, a Black woman in Ann Petry's novel *The Street* (1948), domestic service in 1944 was both a means of making a living and a training ground in middle-class life style. Lutie leaves her overcrowded home in Queens, where she lives with her husband, son, father, and the foster children they took in as a source of income. She goes to work as a domestic in a wealthy Connecticut suburb in order to support her family. The kitchen in Mrs. Chandler's home seduces and transforms her:

*The kitchen in Connecticut had changed her whole life—that kitchen all tricks and white enamel.*<sup>22</sup>

The entire house seems like a miracle to Lutie: "taken all together it was like something in the movies." Lutie's dreams are further fueled by magazines such as *House Beautiful*, which Mrs. Chandler hands to her unread. A subway advertisement she sees completes the dream:

*[It] pictured a girl with incredible blond hair. The girl leaned close to a dark-haired smiling man in a navy uniform. They were standing in front of a kitchen sink—a sink whose white porcelain surface gleamed under the train lights. The faucets looked like silver. The linoleum floor of the kitchen was a crisp black-and-white pattern that pointed up the sparkle of the room. Casement windows. Red geraniums in yellow pots.*<sup>23</sup>

While Lutie is working in the Connecticut kitchen, her husband finds another woman. Lutie takes an apartment with her son—a dark, small, rundown three-room apartment on 116th Street where:

*...the sink was battered; and the gas stove was a little rusted. The faint smell of gas that hovered about it suggested a slow, incurable leak somewhere in its connections.*<sup>24</sup>

Lutie is left to struggle and dream her way up the ladder of success, out of that small apartment and off that threatening street.

The dream of many of these women is the clean but still fettered middle-class version of the home, fostered by settlement house education of the "under-classes," by popular magazines, and later by television. This dream house has a room for every function, a kitchen for mother or maid, no place for neighbors. Continual consumption of furnishings and equipment replaces "real" work.

### III. Kitchen Artists

Without romanticizing the consignment of women to the private sphere, women's literature does show the kitchen to be a place where intense positive emotional interactions occur between women, as well as the tense, charged emotions of

struggle and dreams. Women talk privately and seriously over the kitchen table, using a different language from men. Mary, in Nicholasa Mohr's story "Old Mary," is a middle-aged Puerto Rican living on the Lower East Side but dreaming of a "clean house in a good neighborhood on a street where they collect the garbage." She visits a friend in her kitchen: *Old Mary sat in the small spotless kitchen with Dona Teresa. It had been a slow difficult climb up four flights of steps, especially on such a hot muggy day. But it was worth it to be with her friend. Dona Teresa had sent Sarita to wash up and do chores, so now they could talk privately.*<sup>25</sup>

Maxine Hong Kingston, in her autobiography *The Woman Warrior* (1975), relates the occasion of her mother's sister, Moon Orchid, arriving from China. Her mother, Brave Orchid, cooked "enough food to cover the dining room and kitchen tables." After they had eaten and cleaned up, Brave Orchid declares "Now! We have to get down to business." The two women "sat in the enormous kitchen with the butcher's block and two refrigerators" and talked while the husband goes to sleep.<sup>26</sup>

Pat Steir, in the poem "Kitchens 1970," recalls her mother and Aunt Beverly talking in the kitchen, their voices:

*coming through the open window  
kitchen...  
All summer they drank iced coffee with  
milk in it.  
they sat in their flower-print housedresses  
at the white enamel kitchen table . near  
the window  
sometimes—but rarely laughing .  
endlessly talking about childhood  
friends . operations .  
and abortions . death . and money .*<sup>27</sup>

Faith, a 42-year-old New York City jogger in Grace Paley's story "The Long-Distance Runner," returns to the apartment of her youth in Brighton Beach to find Mrs. Liddy, a Black woman, and her four children living there.

*The kitchen was the same. The table was the enameled table common to our class; easy to clean, with wooden undercorners for indigent and old cockroaches that couldn't make the kitchen sink. (However, it was not the same table, because I have inherited that one, chips and all.)*<sup>28</sup>

Mrs. Liddy hardly ever leaves her home; she spends her time washing the babies, changing their diapers, washing clothes, ironing, feeding people, and sitting by the window. Faith stays for three weeks and joins Mrs. Liddy in these chores. They talk over the kitchen table about food, men, and their mamas, even though their economic and social positions seemingly separate them.

Women's connections in their private spaces are not only those of commiseration; they often lead to group struggles within and without the community. Paley's story "Politics" describes mothers discussing a fence for the neighborhood playground. Eventually they go to the Board of Estimate's hearing with demands for the fence. Anzia Yezierska's story "The Lord Giveth" depicts Hannah Breiné organizing a collection in the butcher-shop for little Rachel and her parents, who have been evicted from their dwelling.

"The Lost Beautifulness" by Yezierska shows the rich complexity of drama in the private sphere—both the oppression and creativity—both the power and powerlessness women have in their kitchens. Hannah Hayyeh works for weeks to redo her tenement kitchen into the white dream kitchen with red geraniums she first encountered five years before, working in Mrs. Preston's kitchen. Mrs. Preston had once called her a laundry artist, now Hannah proudly becomes a kitchen artist. Her work of art is a gift for her son, who is returning from the Army. Because she has improved the kitchen, her rent is raised once and then again. Upon getting a dispossess notice, Hannah and the neighboring women gather in the kitchen. They cannot prevent the eviction, so on the night before she must vacate Hannah takes an axe and destroys her creation:

*With savage fury, she seized the chopping axe and began to scratch down the paint, breaking the plaster on the walls. She tore up the floor-boards. She unscrewed the gas-jets, turned on the gas full force so as to blacken the white-painted ceiling. The night through she raged with the frenzy of destruction. . . . She looked at her dish-closet, once precious, that she had scratched and defaced; the up-rooted geranium box on the window sill; the marred walls. . . . For every inch of broken plaster there was a scar on her heart. She had destroyed that which had taken her so many years of prayer and longing to build up.*<sup>29</sup>

Hannah is an artist like the working women described by Virginia Woolf who were members of the Woman's Co-operative Guild and wrote in kitchens "thick with steam."<sup>30</sup> Hannah is an artist, like the anonymous Black woman Alice Walker writes of whose quilt hangs in the Smithsonian—"an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use."<sup>31</sup>

The mother, housewife, and photographer in Rosellen Brown's story "Good Housekeeping" typifies the contradictions and creativity women experience in the private sphere. The mother of an infant, this woman is immersed in the disorder, frenzy, exhaustion, and beauty of

it all. She attempts to create art out of her situation:

*She put the lens of the camera up so close to the baby's rear that she suddenly thought, What if he craps on the damn thing? But she got the shot, diapered him again, lowered the shade, and closed the door. Turned the coffee pot so a wan light barely struck off the half-shine under the accumulated sludge on its side. Held it over the toilet bowl tilted so the camera wouldn't reflect in the ring of water.*<sup>32</sup>

The mainstream culture's view of women posits a choice between either total immersion in the kitchen—be it the crowded, seemingly warmer one of the working class or immigrant culture or the empty, sex-segregated, shiny white one of the middle class—or total rejection of the kitchen. Implicit in rejecting the kitchen is embracing the public world valued for its individuality, rationality, order, and competitiveness. In women's writings there is a recognition of the dual nature of women's condition—that the orientation to interiors has been imposed as well as desired but that, nevertheless, from within that confined space profound relationships and culture do develop. Perhaps a future vision is to be found in Adele Linder, who eventually rejects the dream of a middle-class home and leaves the oppression of her working-class job as a kitchen maid. She returns instead to an Essex Street kitchen, embraces the memory of her mother in "our old kitchen," and attempts to build new forms of family and community, joining public and private by opening a coffee house in the heart of a tenement.

1. Grace Paley, "Used Boy Raisers," in *The Little Disturbances of Man* (New York: New American Library, 1973), pp. 127, 130, 134.
2. Anne Sexton, "Housewife," in *No More Masks!—An Anthology of Poems by Women*, ed. Florence Howe and Ellen Bass (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), p. 188.
3. For a discussion of housing, women's roles and the ideological inculcation of these roles, see such works as: David Handlin, "The Detached House in the Age of the Object and Beyond," in *Housing Perspectives*, ed. Carol Wedin and L. Gertrude Nygren (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1976); Gwendolyn Wright, "Sweet and Clean: The Domestic Landscape in the Progressive Era," *Landscape*, Vol. XX (Oct. 1975); Dorothy E. Smith, "Household Space and Family Organization," *Pacific Sociological Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan. 1971); Sheila de Bretteville, "The Parlorization of Our Homes and Ourselves," *Chrysalis*, No. 9 (Fall 1979); Elizabeth Weatherford, "Women's Traditional Architecture," *Heresies*, No. 2 (May 1977); Susana Torre, Ed., *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979); Marlene Stern Wortman, "Domesticating the Nineteenth Century American City," *Prospects*, Vol. III (1977); Dolores Hayden and Gwendolyn Wright, "Architecture and Urban Planning," *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1976).
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5. On rooms as metaphors and the image of women's condition in literature and art, see: Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Suzanne Juhasz, "Transformations in Feminist Poetry," *Frontiers*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1979); Lucy R. Lippard, "Centers and Fragments: Women's Spaces" and Susana Torre, "The Pyramid and the Labyrinth," both in *Women in American Architecture* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977).
6. Elizabeth G. Stern, *My Mother and I* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 21.
7. The home and work lives of working-class immigrant and ethnic women have been studied by such people as: Susan Kleinberg, "Technology and Women's Work: The Lives of Working-Class Women in Pittsburgh, 1870-1900," *Labor History*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter, 1976); Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "A Case Study of Technological Change: The Washing Machine and the Working Wife," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
8. Esta Seaton, "Exploration," in *The Ethnic American Woman: Problems, Protests, Lifestyle*, ed. Edith Bicksilver (Iowa: Hunt, 1978), p. 63.
9. Francine Krasno, "Celia," *Conditions*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring 1978), pp. 15, 17, 18.
10. Paula Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 197.
11. Anzia Yezierska, "Children of Loneliness," in *The Open Cage: An Anzia Yezierska Collection* (New York: Persea Books, 1979), p. 150.
12. *Ibid.* pp. 154-155.
13. Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, pp. 251-252.
14. See Helen M. Bannan, "Warrior Women: Immigrant Mothers in the Works of Their Daughters," *Women's Studies*, No. 6 (1979).
15. Nicholasa Mohr, "Herman and Alice," in *El Bronx Remembered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 126.
16. *Ibid.* p. 129.
17. Stern, *My Mother and I*, pp. 98-99.
18. Anzia Yezierska, *Arrogant Beggar* (New York: Doubleday, 1927), p. 64.
19. Anzia Yezierska, "The Free Vacation House," in *Hungry Hearts* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1920), p. 112.
20. Anzia Yezierska, "The Fat of the Land," in *The Open Cage*, p. 89.
21. *Ibid.* p. 97.
22. Ann Petry, *The Street* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1976), p. 39.
23. *Ibid.* p. 23.
24. *Ibid.* p. 16.
25. Nicholasa Mohr, "Old Mary" in *In Nu-eva York* (New York: Dell, 1977), p. 13.
26. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memories of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p. 143.
27. Pat Steir, "Kitchens 1970," *Heresies*, No. 2 (May 1977), p. 96.
28. Grace Paley, "The Long Distance Runner," in *Enormous Changes at the Last Moment* (New York: Dell, 1974), p. 195.
29. Anzia Yezierska, "The Lost Beauty," in *The Open Cage*, pp. 121-123.
30. Virginia Woolf, "Introductory Letter," in *Life As We Have Known It*, by Co-Operative Working Women, ed. Margaret Llewlyn Davies (New York: Norton, 1975), p. xxxv.
31. Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," *Southern Exposure*, Vol. IV, No. 4, p. 63.
32. Rosellen Brown, "Good Housekeeping: A (Very) Short Story," in *Motherlove: Stories by Women about Motherhood*, ed. Stephanie Spinner (New York: Dell, 1978), pp. 120-121.

This essay was written in my kitchen under an NEH Fellowship. It is part of a larger work in progress that deals with the kitchen as a potent repository of feelings, attitudes, and myths which are expressed in part in literature by women. I wish to thank Joan Greenbaum, Dolores Hayden, Jackie Leavitt, and Jane McGroarty, among many.

Nan Bauer Maglin teaches at Manhattan Community College, CUNY. Her latest article, "Don't never forget the bridge you crossed over on: The Literature of Matrilineage," appears in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*.

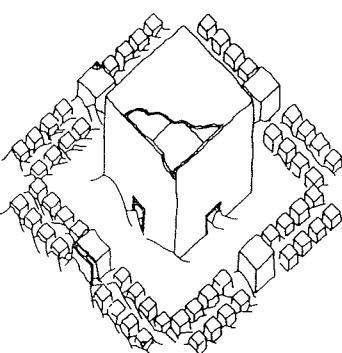
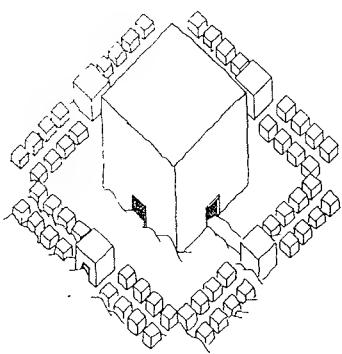
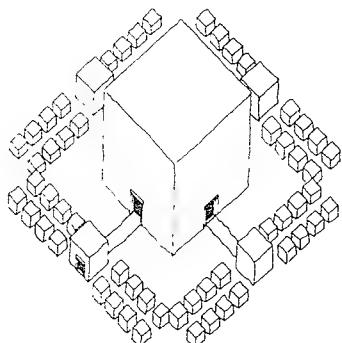
*This conference center in the Sahara Desert was designed by an international council on cities to combine dialogue on women's role in cities with physical work. The participants/residents are urban women from many countries.*

*The plan derives from the plan of an ideal Renaissance city. The large cubes are for public functions; the small cubes are individual dwellings. The interior walls are covered with decorative pieces woven by women from the participating countries.*

*The cubes are made of a wet sand/concrete mixture. If not maintained, the walls will return to sand. Each woman maintains her own cube and works with others on the large cubes. The repetitive work of troweling the structures is called "house-work."*

# Cubes in the Sahara

## Gail Price



**The First Month:** Opening ceremonies and symbolic acts of friendship occur during the first week. The rest of the time is given over to learning each other's languages and one common language. The work on the cubes is not very difficult, although new to the women. The women are friendly, but also a little afraid.

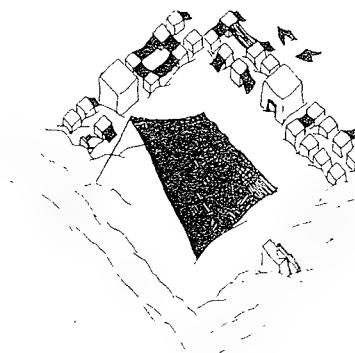
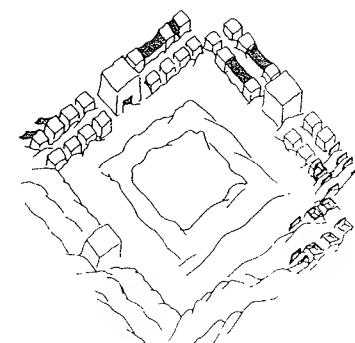
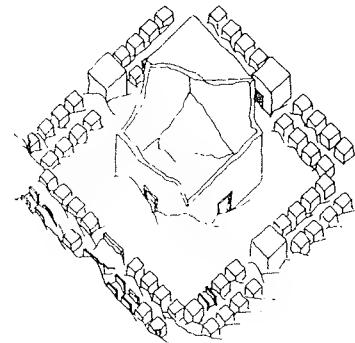
**The Second Month:** The women now know each other's languages fairly well, but the translation cube is still maintained. Although all the cubes/homes are pretty much alike, some of the women have begun to compete to have the "nicest" cube. There are intellectual discussions about cities, but they are formal and somewhat forced.

**The Third Month:** The system begins to break down. The weather is now quite warm. The work becomes a strain for some of the women. The prevailing winds from the northeast make it difficult to maintain the cubes on that side because of drifting sand. The translation cube (on the north side) is abandoned. Most of the talking has stopped because of the work.

**The Fourth Month:** The work is getting ahead of the women. The sand continues to drift in. Some of the women are worn out and have abandoned their cubes. Others deliberately break down their cubes in frustration. One woman cries out, "There is something so terribly wrong with all of this." Other women question the work and try other solutions.

**The Fifth Month:** After a period of depression and desolation, the women begin real discussions and experiments on how the city should function. The large central structure is abandoned. Some women have already moved in with each other; now others begin to link cubes together and make new spaces with the wall hangings, which were originally thought to be purely decorative.

**The Sixth Month:** There is a celebration. The women join some of the wall cloths together to form a tent structure, supported by the forces that tore down the cubes. The men who set up the conference return for the ritual closing ceremonies and find both the women and the city very different.



*Gail Price is an architect, cartographer, and mother.*

© 1981 Gail Price

*\*This was a second-year student project done in 1975 at the New Jersey School of Architecture.*

# A Place of Birth

## The Changing Structure of Obstetrical Care

Jan Bishop and Barbara Marks

**D**uring the past decade the concept of a new form of obstetrical services has emerged—the birth center. The birth center offers an alternative to the growing number of families who are turning away from the sterility of institutional obstetrical care. It attempts to retain the social and psychological advantages of home delivery, while providing medical safety in a non-hospital setting.

The birth center has developed out of a *consumer-based* movement. During the '70s, feminist organizations, such as the Boston Women's Health Collective, became increasingly involved in raising women's consciousness of their rights and responsibilities in making active choices in areas directly affecting their minds and bodies. The proliferation of health care literature by women for women facilitated informed decision-making by a population that had for years been controlled by the male medical profession's attitude: "We know what is best for you." Armed with this new knowledge and self-help skills, women and families could now responsibly question the impact of institutionalized obstetrical care on the physical and psychological well-being of themselves and their newborns. It was out of this climate—in direct response to the family's desire for a more personalized, yet safe, childbearing environment—that the birth center, with its particular organizational structure, services, and physical facilities, evolved.

Indeed, the idea of a birth center attracted the attention of a diverse group of women—from expectant mothers to nurse-midwives and other health care workers to women architects. The birth center seemed to offer a virgin landscape for the development of a new building prototype. How to start a birth center became a topic for workshops and seminars in the '70s. Consumer and provider groups, interested in pioneering this alternative health care concept, came together to explore how they could create an environment responsive to the community's needs. Financial, legal, and political questions were jointly discussed, along with the functional and aesthetic aspects that should be incorporated in a birth center. At the same time, as the number of women in architectural schools increased

female students began to demand that architectural education become more meaningful to women, particularly by paying attention to the needs of women as a user group. The concept of a birth center fed into these concerns and thus became the subject of architectural studio projects in many schools across the country.

### The Contrast: Hospital versus Birth Center

To envision the potential of the birth center, one might begin by picturing the failings in current hospital delivery services. The design of most hospital obstetrical units is based on a traditional medical model, in which pregnancy becomes a "disease" demanding the care of a physician and complex technology. This is true despite widespread documentation that childbirth is a normal physiological process that follows a natural, uncomplicated course in the majority of childbearing women. In other words, institutional obstetrical care is focused on the needs of an estimated five to ten percent of the childbearing population considered "at risk" and in need of specialized support staff, drugs, and high-technology equipment.

The planning of obstetrical units has typically grown out of the needs and desires of obstetrical department heads. As both the obstetrical and architectural professions have been dominated by men, input from women professionals has been minimal. Moreover, at no point has input been solicited from the consumer population using the facility—childbearing women and their families.

The obstetrical unit itself is only the place for delivery; it is not integrated into the overall care and preparation for childbirth. Prenatal care and parenting education often occur in facilities at some distance, both physically and psychologically, from the maternity ward. While most hospitals routinely provide tours of the obstetrical facilities, familiarity with the complex quarters cannot be gained within the time frame of a tour.

The efficient control of obstetrical patients is commonly achieved through a complex maze of spaces, located within the pathogenic context of an acute care facility. Traditionally, obstetrical units consist of three separate components: the

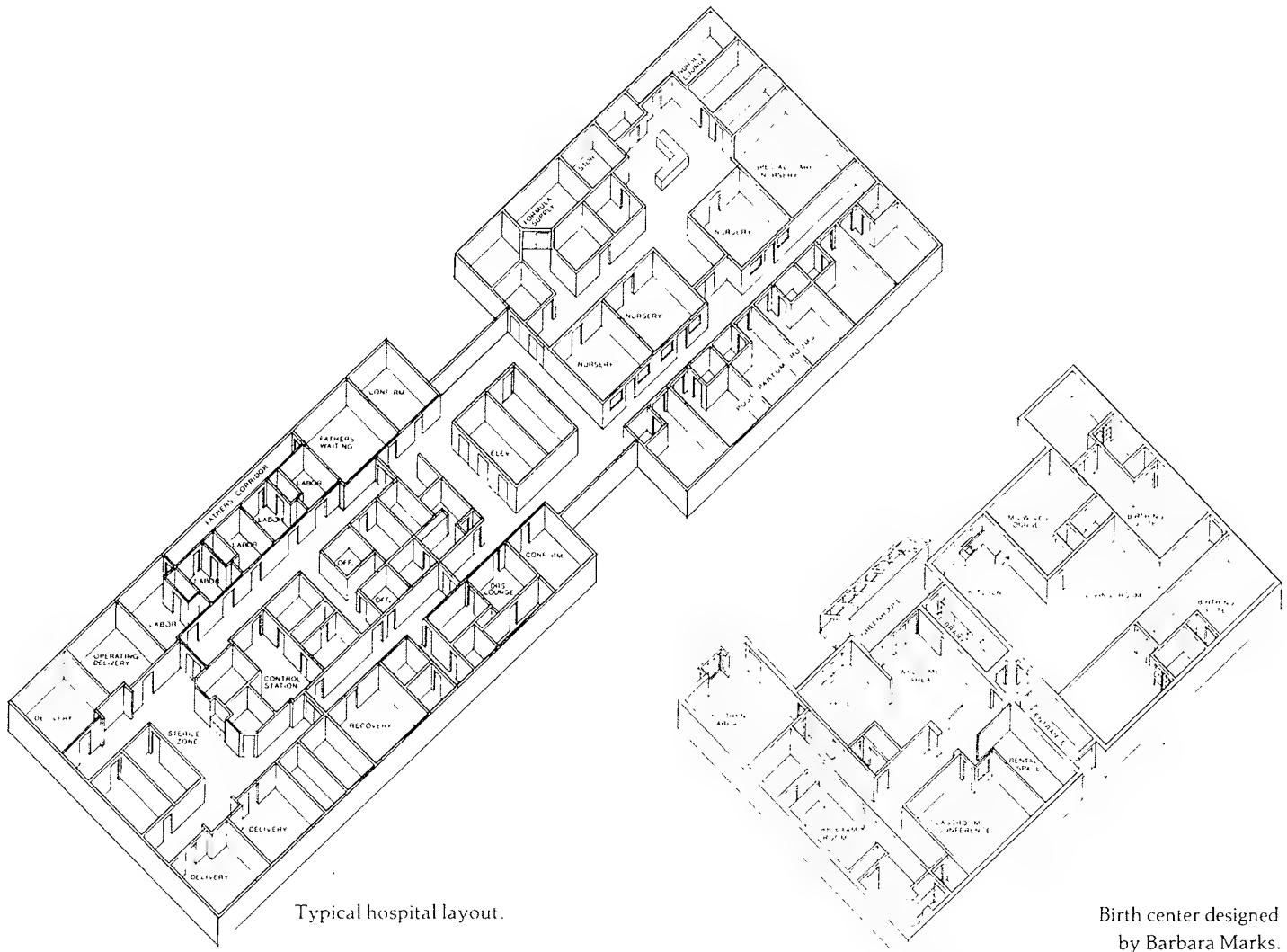
labor and delivery suite, the newborn nursery, and the postpartum nursing unit. Ideally the three are located in a contiguous relationship, but sometimes they may even be on different floors.

In most hospitals rigid and voluminous policies control the "patient" and family from the moment they walk into the admitting office. The patient is routinely confined to a wheelchair to begin a long journey that gradually takes over the natural physiological functions of childbearing. The patient and her family are escorted through anonymous corridors and elevators to the labor and delivery suite. The father, or other support-person, is directed to a family waiting room, but is usually allowed to join the patient in the labor room.

At the point of imminent delivery the patient is wheeled on a stretcher to the restricted, sterile delivery room. Again most hospitals allow the father to accompany the patient if a normal delivery is anticipated. Following delivery, the infant is quickly removed from the parents to the nursery for observation, while the mother is taken on a stretcher to the recovery room. The father is commonly sent back to the waiting room until the mother is transferred to the postpartum unit.

The mother must then wait out the average three- to five-day postpartum stay, dependent on nursing staff and hospital policy for the frequency with which her infant is transported back and forth from the newborn nursery. Although some hospitals have flexible rooming-in policies for mother and infant, common deterrents cited are insufficient space in patient rooms and the increased staffing required by decentralized nursery care. Also dependent on hospital policy is other family members' access to the mother and infant. Not until discharge from the hospital is the new family truly united and in a position to control the decisions affecting the well-being of their family unit.

Now let us look at the contrasting picture of a birth center, which offers comprehensive and personal maternity care at a considerably reduced cost. In terms of medical safety, birth centers are staffed by certified nurse-midwives, consulting physicians, and other ancillary medical professionals. Women are carefully screened for potential complications during preg-



Typical hospital layout.

Birth center designed  
by Barbara Marks.

nancy or delivery and only "low-risk" mothers, who anticipate normal childbirth, are accepted. If complications do arise, the childbearing woman and midwife can be transferred to the local back-up hospital.

At the birth center childbearing women and their families routinely attend educational classes and prenatal examinations. A support-person selected by the pregnant woman—most often the father-to-be—is a critical member of the health care team and participates in all phases of pregnancy. By the time the woman and her support-person are ready for delivery, the birth center is already a familiar part of their environment, as classrooms and examination rooms are usually contiguous to the birthing area.

One typical design for the birthing area itself shows a birthing suite (consisting of a bedroom and a private family living room), as well as kitchen facilities and a general lounge. The structure is set up for one to feel at home, with freedom to move around. The expectant mother, along with her family and friends, can

comfortably progress together through the stages of labor. Adjacent to the family living room is the bedroom—so the mother has the choice of being alone or with family and friends. There the nurse-midwife and support-person assist the childbearing woman during the birth process. One design possibility is a door of heavy wood, enhancing the sense of privacy (if the mother wants to scream she can then do this without disturbing anyone).

Following birth, the new family remains in the birthing suite to celebrate, rest, and unite. Typically discharge from the birth center occurs within 8 to 12 hours after birth, with follow-up phone calls and home visits by the birth center staff during the early postpartum days. Return visits to the birth center for well-baby and well-woman care are common aftercare procedures.

To date, all birth centers have entailed adaptive reuse of existing structures—from residential to office-type buildings. Smallness of scale and homelike qualities have been emphasized, with a major con-

cern being the provision of an environment that is an extension of known experiences. In contrast to the controlling atmosphere of the hospital, a sense of freedom and flexibility is integral to the design of all birth centers.

#### The Political Battle

Birth centers represent an exciting opportunity for innovative architectural expression. But a note of warning must be sounded for those who unwittingly think that the only major barrier to the construction of community birth centers is the absence of a suitable design concept. The viability of the birth center, as an appropriate and acceptable mode of health care delivery, is seriously being threatened by its institutional counterpart—the organized medical profession.

Rather than viewing birth centers as an additive component to the health care network—a reasonable alternative for low-risk childbirth—medical professionals have begun to rally against what they see as a competitive threat to their prac-

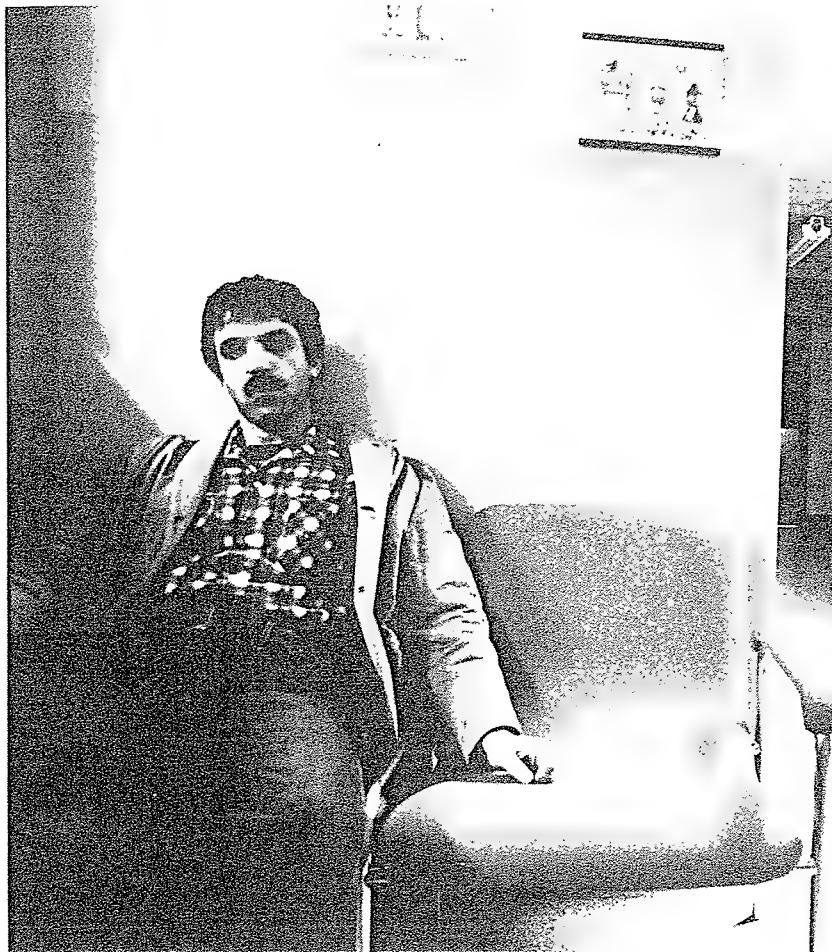


Photo by S. Chernoff © 1977.

tice. Fearful of a lower birth rate and thus a dwindling patient load, both hospitals and physicians have spurred opposition to the continuing development of birth centers. Lobbying efforts are being directed at the regional and state agencies responsible for approving new health care facilities. Their contention is that *all* births should occur in a hospital, under the direct supervision of a physician. In some areas the medical profession has directed its effort at curtailing the practice of nurse-midwives—the primary caregivers in birth centers. A recent communication circulated among physicians in a statewide lobbying effort warned obstetricians to remember their motto: *illigetimus non corborundum* (don't let the bastards wear you down).

Very few states have established the licensing categories and reimbursement mechanisms that are necessary prerequisites for birth centers to operate as health care facilities and to achieve financial viability. Third-party payers, such as insurance carriers or Medicaid, have also been slow to negotiate reimbursement contracts for birth centers, although cost savings

are in excess of 50 percent when compared with the institutional obstetrical care that is currently reimbursed.

Yet the outlook is not entirely bleak. Many birth centers have successfully battled and won, paving the way for followers. Indeed, the need to overcome the various political, legal, and economic hurdles may have a positive effect on the planning and design process within the architectural profession. In most states, licensing and construction codes, which dictate functional space requirements, do not exist for the building category of birth centers. Initiatives from the architectural community can help to develop these standards.

The struggle to make birth centers a reality is thus much more than the translation of a new design concept into a physical form. The deinstitutionalization of obstetrical care has involved a complex process of change: it is the shift in power and control and the change in the services demanded that finally place us in a position to alter the physical facility. The process of these changes must be understood and utilized in designing new birth

centers. We must assure that the process that has begun—creating environments that are responsive to the needs and desires of those who use them—is not negated.

By working collectively with caregivers and consumers in all of the developmental steps of a birth center, the planning and design process should ultimately bring about a physical form that is truly representative of the birth center concept—where the informed participation of the childbearing family in the events and decisions that affect their lives remains a constant objective.

*Jan Bishop, an architect and health planner, has worked for the Health Systems Agency. She has written a hospital manual on the implementation of family-centered maternity care.*

*Barbara Marks is an architect working in NYC.*

## Home as Symbolic Form

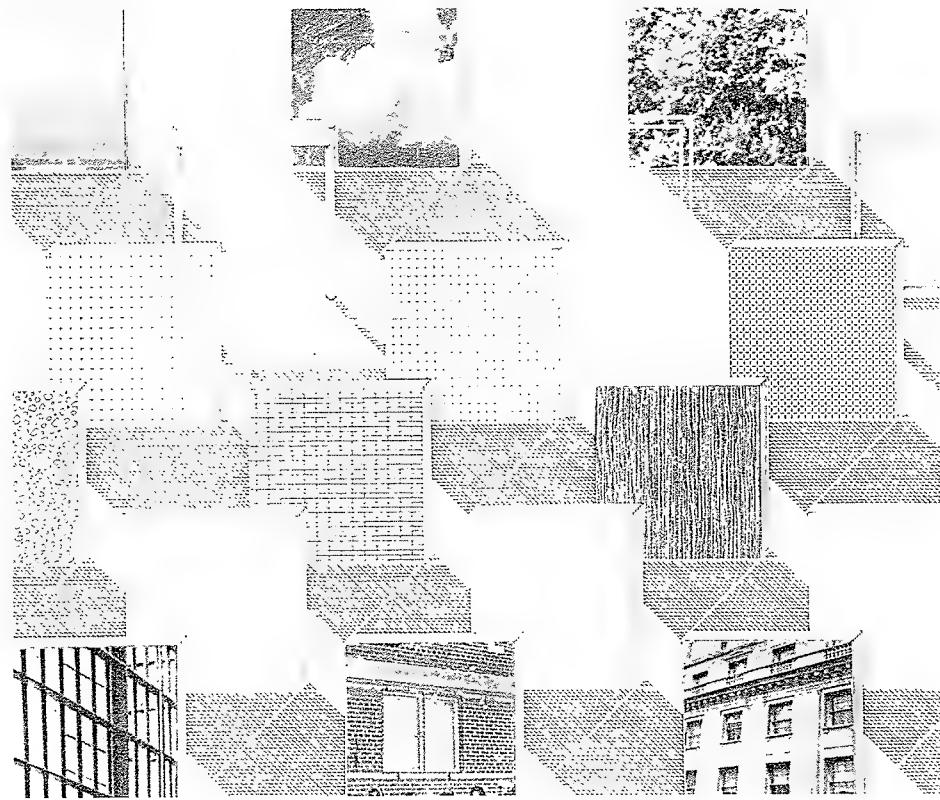
Like the city, the home is one of culture's most powerful *symbolic forms*. It embodies specific, usually dominant, ideologies about how people should live, what kinds of values and hierarchies should be fostered within the family, and how its occupants should relate to the public world. Historically, the image, form, and structure of housing have been used by both rulers and reformers to reinforce their beliefs. We can thus understand why, just as at the turn of the century, feminists today are attempting to create their own home images to promote the idea of a non-sexist egalitarian society.

The switch from one version of the ideal home to another does not happen simply because one image has been made more appealing through mass media promotion or becomes acceptable under the standards set for middle-class achievement. For an image to become a symbolic form, a number of related social, economic, and cultural factors must coalesce and the image must account, in some basic, clear, and univocal way, for all of them. Catherine Beecher's *American Woman's Home* prototype of 1869 is such a symbolic form. It is an isolated object in a privately owned plot, reminiscent of a picture-book church and schoolhouse meshed together. Its open plan, divided by movable screens and closets has the kitchen as its physical and symbolic center. At the time Beecher's domestic prototype responded to a multitude of variables: increasing industrialization with the emergence of a more affluent but servantless middle class; renewed efforts to uphold Victorian values in a changing society through a moral emphasis on religious belief and sexual division of labor; the growing influence of pseudo-scientific, managerial theories about domestic life; and a perceived need to both rationalize and idealize woman's role within the home by promulgating the view that it was her duty and her calling to act as spiritual minister and efficient manager of the household, to be self-sufficient, and, like her home, to stand proud in isolation.

A symbolic form is not visionary; it represents the progressive synthesis of diverse conditions experienced by the majority of a social group. The power of a symbolic form resides in its articulation and formalization of a cultural model that will allow these conditions (*qua* ideology) to endure beyond their time and to shape the consciousness of future generations.

### The House of Meanings (1970-72)

The creation of a symbolic form is only possible through successive approximations. This project, designed between 1970 and 1972, is an attempt in that direction. The House of Meanings is intended



## Space as Matrix

Susana Torre

to respond to demands for growth and transformation, a premise which continues to be valid, especially in the context of the current needs of working women and their families. Perhaps it is not an accident that the clients for the different versions shown here were women. Possibly they found in the ideal of the project many affinities with the changing patterns of their own lives.

The House of Meanings is not a specific house. Rather, it uses the principle of *space as matrix*. A matrix space is a critique of the traditional division of space into enclosed rooms which, in their size and location within the house, establish a rigid hierarchy of importance among certain members of the household. It is also a critique of the usual distinction between enclosed rooms for private activities and corridors for circulation—a spatial setup originally designed to separate household members from their hired servants. Today, this spatial form perpetuates a sharp sepa-

ration between private spaces for personal withdrawal and those for togetherness. In contrast, the matrix space assumes a breakdown of the conventional distinction between private and public, individual and shared, proposing an interaction between opposites.

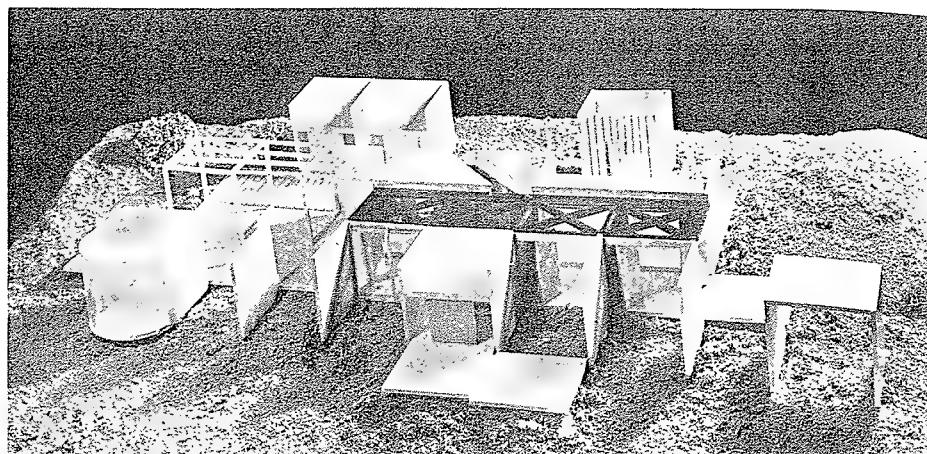
A matrix space is also a critique of the open plan, with its lack of differentiation and hierarchy. When an open plan is used for a shared personal dwelling, power and submission often become the means to resolve priorities in competing uses.

The matrix space of the House of Meanings aims to achieve both spatial continuity and spatial hierarchy. To visualize this idea, one must conceive not a single-level plan but multiple plans, showing how the space is divided at different heights. One can then see that it is possible to achieve seemingly opposite objectives: open/enclosed, isolated/connected, low/high, small/large, intimate/monumental.

The second principle of the House of Meanings is the creation of *multifunctional* spaces. When rooms are dimensioned for a single function (such as a bedroom or living room), the potential furniture layout is already embedded in the room's size and proportions. However close the notion of multifunctionality may be to the way people actually live, it is contradicted by present housing standards and is almost unachievable in multiple dwellings. One might compare this to the way current zoning requirements in suburbia make it illegal to establish shared service structures across property lines or to open a small store or a child-care center in a residential district. Segregation of functions and the single use of spaces promote unwholesome isolation between private, shared, and public life.

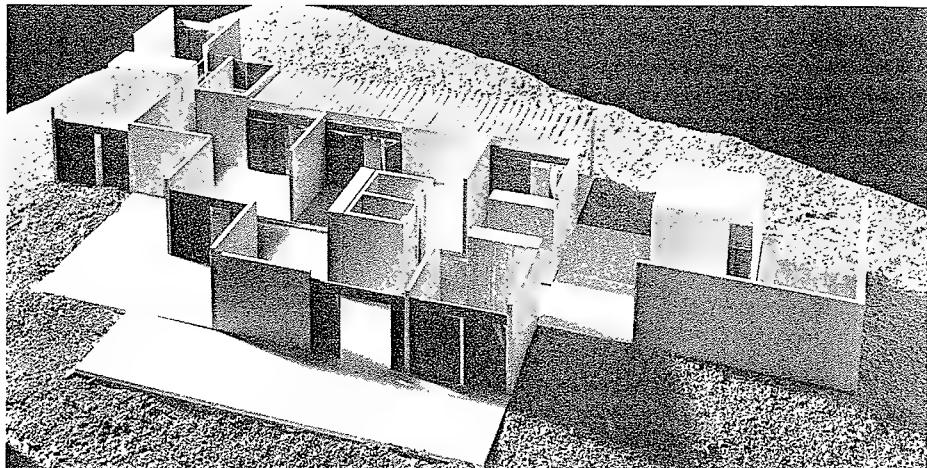
The third principle is the combination of the formal integrity and completeness of an architectural object with the changing and temporary patterns that arise in the process of dwelling. Most people prefer to live in dwellings that can be transformed and added to. The formal logic of vernacular architecture encompasses adaptability and change, whereas the formal logic of Architecture as art inevitably implies a closed, self-referential condition. In the House of Meanings the tension between and integration of Architecture and Dwelling occurs by juxtaposing a matrix of fixed walls with a matrix of spatial incidents. The wall, in Western architecture, is the primary architectural element. It distinguishes between inside and outside; it creates a boundary and a support for shelter. According to psychohistorians of the built environment, the wall is associated in the Western unconscious with the memory of the mother. In sources ranging from nursery rhymes (Humpty Dumpty and his fall) to literary works, films, and the visual arts, the wall has dual connotations of enclosure and protection, as well as separation and denial. The wall matrix of the House of Meanings is open-ended. As will be seen in the actual projects, a physical wall does not always exist where one might seem indicated. Sometimes the walls simply suggest a potential space to be occupied.

Although the two versions presented here are for single houses sheltering a shared, collective life, it should be evident that the spatial matrix is like the tissue of vernacular housing. As such, it is capable of creating connections in all directions while allowing for physical distance and formal differentiation; it can thus encompass other dwellings within it. The ultimate form of each house cannot be known, for it always exists in a "present" state of completion, capable of being altered—in a state of equipoise between permanence and change, art and life.



This version was designed for a writer who is often visited for long periods by friends and by her two grown children. The location is a low hill facing the ocean in northern Puerto Rico. The living arcade (under the darker roof) is a space with informal furniture groupings. Each private room, proportioned and dimensioned for multiple and interchangeable use, can be partially or completely opened to the living arcade, allowing the extension of collective activities into the private realm if

so desired. The two joined pavilions behind the main house serve as the living quarters of the children and guests. The trellised space, covered with vines, defines outdoor rooms where hammocks may be placed. Only two rooms deny the continuity of the living spatial matrix: an enclosed courtyard and a skylit room facing the ocean. While responding to a conventional sense of privacy, understood as withdrawal, these spaces allow intense contact with others. The total covered area is approximately 1,200 square feet.



This version was designed for an extended family in Santo Domingo, consisting of a couple and the wife's mother and younger sister. Because their lives are both joined and separate, the private rooms of each household have been paired at opposite ends of the house. The main connecting space is a series of three rooms in a zig-zag pattern, which can be divided in many different ways by large sliding doors. The two rooms closest to each pair of private rooms are mostly used as the living rooms of each household. The middle space, open to the large kitchen, is for eating and serves as the principal gathering place for everyone in the house. Should two gatherings take place simultaneously, this room can be closed off from the kitchen, where there is space for another table for six. The covered gallery is another connecting

space: one living room, the kitchen, and a private room open into it. The rooms can be extended into the gallery, which itself can be expanded into the backyard. The structure and laundry yard to the right of the car entrance can become the starting place for future additions once the younger sister establishes her own separate, but connected, household. At present, the structure is used by the mother, who is a seamstress, as her workshop and office. The total covered area is approximately 1,400 square feet.

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# *The Passing of the Home in Great American Cities*

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman*

*This article originally appeared in Cosmopolitan (December 1904). Gilman's incisive analysis is as fresh and astonishing today as it must have been at the turn of the century. With the exception of some minor editing, we have reprinted Gilman's article intact.*

**W**e in America, springing to life as a nation in our pioneer period, with our first proud ideals all based on the facts of that period, and dominated by a literature deeply colored by those same facts and ideals, are slow to recognize our own growth.

When we say "the American home," we think instinctively of the home of a hundred years ago; and a hundred years in this age of cumulative progress means more than a thousand in the far past. Our national life is changing in every feature, changing more swiftly than any people's life ever changed before; and in most of its phenomena we are proud of it. The distinctive spirit of American progress is its sure and instant recognition of new values, new methods, new lines of advance, and its steady courage in taking advantage of them....

And yet, in the very face of this rushing current of progressiveness, we find at times the strangest pools and eddies, dull backwaters where the driftwood of past seasons floats and molders like wrecks in the Sargasso Sea. It is from a stagnant stretch like this that we hear the cry of complaint and warning about the passing of the American home.... It is because we think, in our honest hearts, that our national integrity and health and virtue are bound up in "the Home," and that if it is taken from us we are lost.... We are wrong in supposing that change is necessarily injury, in seeking to maintain the home in some past form and forbid it sharing in the benefits of progress. But while we are musing, the fire burns, the changes go on; and those who observe them cry out as the old Danish king cried out against the rising tide.

In the country there has been less change than in the city, naturally; the isolated farmhouse is still recognizably like

its predecessors of the earlier centuries; yet there is some difference even here. In the cities, notably in our largest ones, the alteration is so great and swift as to force itself upon us with something of a shock, the more so as in a growing city one may find every stage of home building practically side by side.

A ride on the Amsterdam Avenue streetcar in New York City will show the shanty and hovel of the ancient poor, and the crowded tenement of the modern poor; the large, comfortable, detached house of the ancient rich, with lawn and garden and outbuildings, and the long fronts of the side-street blocks where the "homes" stand like books on a shelf, squeezed out of all semblance of a house. This is due to the terrible constriction of financial pressure. This pressure, relentlessly increasing, has forced upward from these level ranks of crowded dwellings the vertical outburst of the apartment home—the "flat," and at this point begins most of the outcry.

So long as our homes had twenty feet square of ground in the backyard, and ten feet of stone steps at the front door, we submitted to the lateral pressure uncomplainingly. We took our air and light at the two ends of the house; we ignored the neighbor whose bed was within a foot of ours, because the party-wall was solid and well deadened. We called our vertical slice of a solid building a block long "a house," and while lamenting at times its lack of physical comfort, we did not feel that its life was attacked. It was still "the home."

But the apartment houses increased so rapidly that levels of domestic life in New York became as varied as its rocky substrata; and then, under the same pressure, the kitchens were squeezed out of the flats, and the apartment hotel appeared.... Now indeed, a cry of horror goes up. We have all along had in our curtained minds an ideal of the home of our grandmothers; the slow compression of that ideal as the city block congealed around it we had not noticed; but now that we see our homes lifted clean off the ground—yardless, cellarless, stairless, even kitchenless—we protest that this is not a home!...

The tendency in terms of brick and mortar is clearly visible. It is from a relatively small, plain, isolated house, holding one family, toward a vast glittering palace of a thousand occupants. The tendency industrially is as clear; it is from the weary housewife making soap and candles, carding, spinning, weaving, dyeing, cutting, sewing, cooking, nursing, sweeping, washing and all the rest, to the handsome, healthy, golf-playing woman who does none of these things (and, to her shame be it spoken, does little else), for her former trades are done each and all by expert professionals.

The tendency in the character of home and family life is not so patently visible, but may yet be traced. It is from a self-centered family life, mainly content with its own members and its immediate neighbors, to a family that is by no means content with its own members, that knows not neighbors though they be as near and numerous as the cells of a honeycomb, and that insists on finding its interests and pleasures in the great outside world.

That this change, psychic and industrial, is going on with the change in architecture, cannot be denied. It may even be wondered if it did not precede it—spirit rightly coming before matter; at any rate, it is here. Now let us examine the real nature of this transformation, without prejudice or terror, and see if it is, after all, as bad as some would have us believe....

For health and comfort, so long as air and light are assured, rooms on one floor are better than on five—better mechanics, better economy of space and time.... Of what do dwellers in flats most complain? The smell of their neighbors' kitchens, the noise of their neighbors' children. So long as that smell and that noise were disseminated freely from the exposed farmhouse, we none of us minded them. So long as, by common consent, the dwellers in the book shelf tucked their kitchens in behind and under, mingling the odors of suds and soup in the huddle of backyards which every resident ignored; sent their children to the top floor—or the park—and politely overlooked the ash barrel and the garbage can immodestly obtruding them-

selves beside the elegant front steps, so long we bore with these things. But when the strata rose under lateral pressure and carried the home upward, by the dozen, its constituent chambers thrown together past ignoring, and with no backyard to dilute its odors for a while, then we found that we did not like our own way of doing business.

A little more squeezing—the kitchen dwindles and cramps to a kitchenette—pop! it is gone! The dining room, lost without its feeder, suffers a gradual transformation to a sort of second parlor, and often it, too, disappears. The children? The apartment house and the hotel evade that question—avoid it—dodge it. They make no provision for children—they don't want any. The children are but few in these sky palaces, and they look out of place. We have not faced the problem of providing for them at all. We shirk it.

And then what happens? What does the family do? The man goes right on with his business as he always did. His bills are heavy, but there is less worry. He works and pays the freight. The woman, relieved of almost all the work she used to do, and too ignorant, too timid, too self-indulgent, to do other work, simply plays most of the time, or labors at amusement, salving her conscience with charity.... The children, when there are any, are seen dully toddling beside unresponsive servants, strapped helpless in wagons; aimlessly playing in the only decent place they have, the public parks; or, in their only semblance of free life, taking the license and education of the streets....

The apartment hotel meets a demand. The position of children is the most prominent evil; yet it is not so much worse than it was before, as it is merely more conspicuous. The apartment hotel only carries out in arrogant and opulent fulfillment the tendencies already at work when the city began to force the homes together and crush them to a lean and breathless strip.

Is this movement wholly bad? Can nothing be done to check it? It is by no means wholly bad; it is mostly good. What is bad about it is our misapprehension, and pig-headed insistence on what we falsely suppose to be valuable things. How then can we modify this process, keeping the grandeur and beauty, the smooth, delicate mechanical adjustment, the care and convenience, and yet keeping love and peace and happy childhood too? Our present objectors have no help to give—they merely howl. They stand screaming in the road and say: "Go back! Go back! This is not the way. Stop! Go back!" Social processes do not stop, much less go back, for anybody's protest. They cannot be arrested or reversed, but they can be steered. We can study them, learn their lines of direction, and take advantage of them, to our great gain. Now let us see what is needed to make "the American city home," in its best and fullest sense, possible to us still, albeit two hundred feet from the ground.

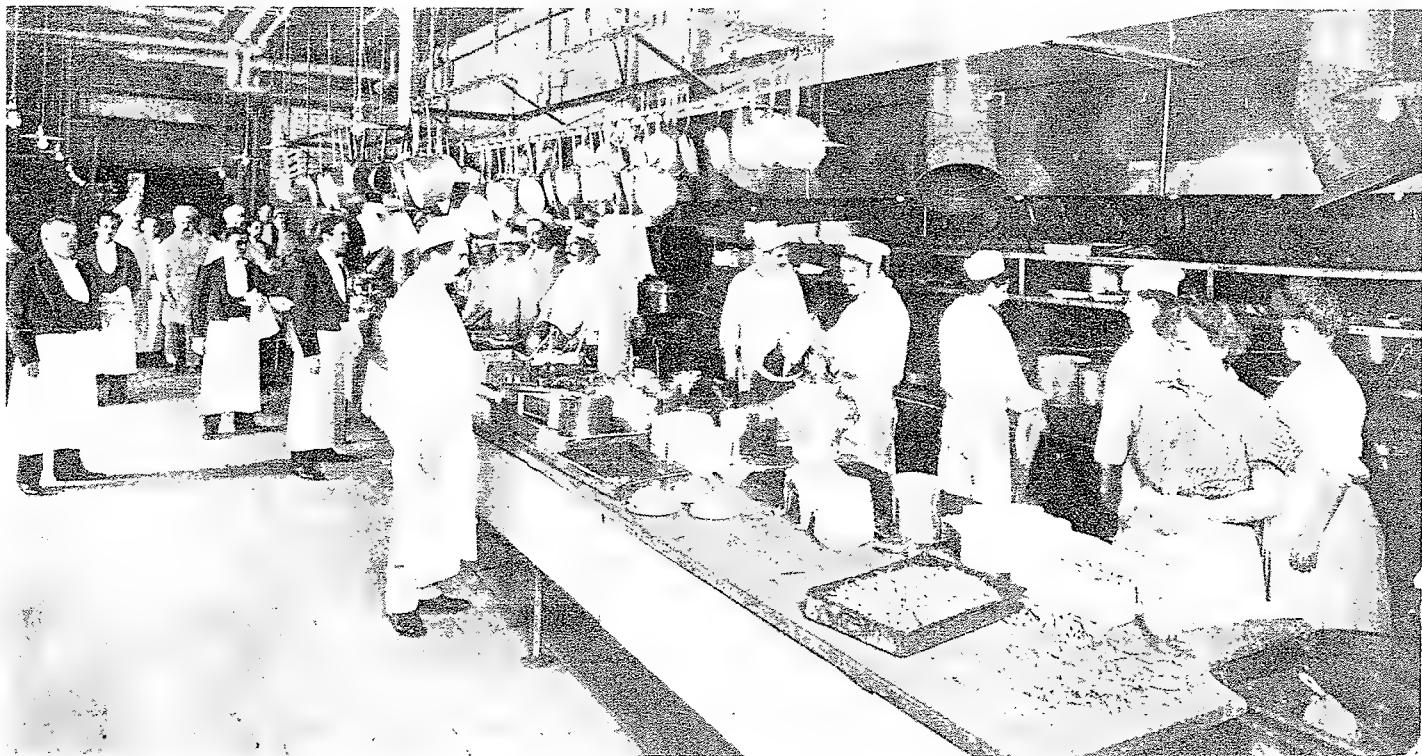
There is no real reason that a man and wife should not be as happy under electric lights as they were underneath the naked stars, on oriental rugs as on the windy

hills or damp leaves of the forest. There is no real reason why children should not be as healthy and happy in a modern palace as in an ancient hut. No real reason, no inherent reason. The difficulty in these things is secondary and removable. We have overlooked the children in building the apartment home—that is all.

We are meeting all adult desires in these huge palaces today. We make for them billiard parlors, smoking rooms, dancing halls, swimming tanks, reception parlors—but we do not build for the children. This is not the special fault of the apartment house. We did not build private houses suited to them either.

What we want is conscientious recognition of child needs when we build homes; and this should be insisted on by their mothers. Now heretofore the mothers were too overwhelmed with house service to demand anything for their children or themselves. As soon as a husband was rich enough to harness other women to his chariot wheels, the mother emerged from her lowly labors, and, like any other released servant, luxuriated in idleness. Low-grade labor does not teach noble ambition.

But this very apartment house, with its inevitable dismissal of the kitchen, with its facility for all skilled specialist labor, has freed the woman from her ancient service, so that she may now see the splendid possibilities of motherhood. She does not do so yet, it is true. The kitchen-mindedness of a thousand centuries cannot rise at once to the grade of twentieth-century life. But see what we



A large kitchen in an apartment hotel.

might have if we would in this most crowded city of the world today; see how the American home may pass from its present transition stage to a noble new development.

On the ground space of a New York block, with our present architecture and mechanical knowledge, we can build homes of such exquisite refinement and simple beauty as should be a constant rest and joy to their inmates. Once eliminating that source of so much dirt, the kitchen, the system of exhaust sweeping now coming into use, with modern plumbing, could keep our homes cleaner than they ever were before. Wise building laws should insure ventilation and sunlight for rich as well as poor.

Long corridors, gliding elevators, soft music at one's meals—these things do not destroy love and happiness; nor does a private cook insure them. Our mistake is in attaching the essential good of home life to nonessential mechanical conditions.

This uneasy expansion from home life into "society life" is in its nature good—bad as are the present results. It is part of the general kindling of the human soul today, the wakening of the social consciousness. It is right, quite right, that man, woman, and child should all demand something more than "home life."

The domestic period, so to speak, is long outgrown. The wrong is that the social life they find outside is so pitifully unsatisfying. The soul today needs far wider acquaintance, more general interest, more collective action, than the soul of remote centuries. We are different—we

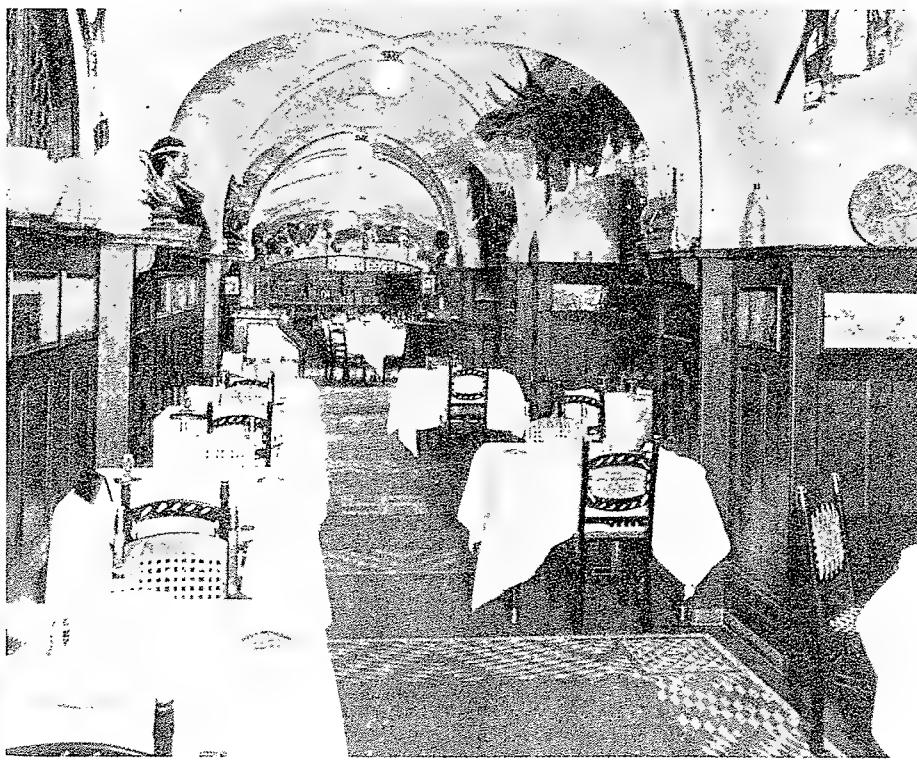
are more complex—and we must continue to become so.

But that complexity should be as clean and natural and wholesome as our early simplicity.... If these apartment houses and hotels were filled with people who appreciated the opportunities of the time they live in, the gathered homes therein would know a larger, higher happiness than any cozy cottage under a woodbine. The wives and mothers of these families would remember that there are children—must be children—and that no hired servant can successfully conceal them. Children are here and must be provided for. The apartment house has not done so yet—but it can, and better than the private house. These great structures could, if they chose, turn their palm-fringed roofs into happy child-gardens, furnish great playrooms, gymnasium, and nurseries; and they will choose when women patrons bring their maternal sentiments up to date. A busy woman, happy and proud in her work, could return to her exquisite nest in one of these glorious palaces, with her husband and children returning from their work and play, to as contented a home life as the world has ever known—and a nobler one as well.

But you say: "It is not the same thing. The home is gone. The children are at nursery or kindergarten, the father away, of course—he always was; but the mother—a woman should give her whole life to the home." No, she should not. No human being should. She should serve society as does her human mate, and they, together, should go home to rest.

It is this change in the heart of the world which is changing the house of the world; and its ultimate meaning is good. Let us then study, understand, and help to hasten this passing onward to better things of our beloved American Home. Let us not be afraid, but lead the world in larger living.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was an author, lecturer, and political activist. Her *Women and Economics* (1898) advanced the idea that only through financial independence would women gain liberation. In 1909 she began to publish the *Forerunner*, a feminist monthly. In 1915 she co-founded the Women's Peace Party.



Typical cafe—an attractive and convenient feature of apartment hotel life.

# The Feminist Paradise Palace

Dolores Hayden

A slender, dark-haired woman, with a light, penetrating voice and great powers as a speaker, Charlotte Perkins Gilman charmed audiences in the last decade of the 19th century in New York and in Topeka, in Kansas City and in London. Her most popular lectures discussed women, men, and the home. Although her eyes flashed with anger or indignation when she spoke of women's oppression, she could quickly change pace, joking, prodding, ridiculing traditionalists who romanticized the Victorian home and woman's place within it:

*It is not that women are really smaller-minded, weaker-minded, more timid and vacillating; but that whosoever, man or woman, lives always in a small dark place, is always guarded, protected, directed and restrained, will become inevitably narrowed and weakened by it. The woman is narrowed by the home and the man is narrowed by the woman.*

In her first book, *Women and Economics*, published in 1898, and in many subsequent books and articles, Gilman prophesied a world where women enjoyed the economic independence of work outside the home for wages and savored the social benefits of life with their families in private kitchenless houses or kitchenless apartments connected to central kitchens, dining rooms, and day-care centers. On the basis of her economic, social, and architectural arguments for collective domestic life, she has been judged the most original feminist the United States has ever produced, and she has been described by various scholars as representing "the full elaboration of the feminist impulse" and as putting forward "radical" proposals based on "socialist" premises. Yet in many ways her program was a somewhat conservative synthesis of earlier material feminist ideas with popular

theories of social evolution. Rather than arguing that evolution would help to free women, Gilman contended that free women could help to speed up evolution. In *Women and Economics* she stated that women were holding back human evolution because of their confinement to household work and motherhood. The evolution of the human race, she believed, would be hastened by removing domestic work and childcare from the home, allowing women to undertake both motherhood and paid employment, making it possible for all women to be economically independent of men. Thus, she argued that the development of socialized domestic work and new domestic environments should be seen as promoting the evolution of socialism, rather than following it. This was her original contribution.

One of several attempts to build such new domestic environments was undertaken by a New York group, the Feminist Alliance, in 1914 and 1915. Henrietta Rodman, active in New York feminist and socialist circles, was the founder of the Feminist Alliance. Rodman had been involved in many trade union struggles in New York and had won recognition for her drive to organize public schoolteachers. In addition to attempting to have women admitted to law and medical schools, the Feminist Alliance won a campaign for maternity leaves for teachers (previously New York's Board of Education had fired teachers who became mothers).

The most ambitious of their projects was the Feminist Apartment Hotel. In 1906 Gilman had written:

*We have so arranged life, that a man may have a home and family, love, companionship, domesticity, and fatherhood, yet remain an active citizen of age and country. We have so arranged life, on the other hand, that a woman must "choose"; must*

*either live alone, unloved, unaccompanied, uncared for, homeless, childless, with her work in the world for sole consolation; or give up all world-service for the joys of love, motherhood, and domestic service.*

Rodman and the other members of the Feminist Alliance were determined to rearrange home life so that women could combine a career and marriage successfully, by creating a new kind of housing.

The group hired Max G. Heidelberg, a radical New York architect, to design a 12-story building on a site near Greenwich Village, including kitchenless apartments, collective housekeeping facilities, and a roof-top nursery school. The building of about 400 rooms, divided into 170 one- to four-room suites, required half a million dollars capital. The Alliance's project was to be controlled by its residents and to provide day-care for the children of employed women, thus recognizing that family and paid work for women were not incompatible activities.

Rodman believed that Alva Belmont and other wealthy investors would guarantee most of the capital. Belmont had come to feminism late in her life but was a heavy contributor to suffrage causes, the Women's Trade Union League, and Max Eastman's socialist magazine *The Masses*. Most important, she had been a flamboyant patron of architecture in her earlier days as a reigning society matron. Richard Morris Hunt had built her a three-million-dollar pseudo-French chateau at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Second Street in 1881, a two-million-dollar "cottage" in Newport in 1892, and another estate in Sands Point, Long Island. To Rodman she appeared a likely supporter for this feminist architectural enterprise.

In addition to \$480,000 from wealthy patrons, the organizers hoped to raise one year's rent in advance from the residents,

"If there should be built and opened in any of our large cities to-day a commodious and well-served apartment house for professional women with families, it would be filled at once." —Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1898

the rather small sum of \$20,000. Single women could live in the building as well as married women with their children and husbands; all resident parents, male and female, were expected to help with child-care. Rodman said: "I maintain that every child has a right to a real father, one who has sufficient leisure to take a real interest in his children." However, she did not assign any other domestic duties to men. She planned for the building to be staffed by "trained help from the domestic science departments of the high schools," working eight-hour days, so that the resident career women would be freed from chores. Thus the pressures forcing women to choose between marriage and a career would disappear:

*Imagine Dr. Katherine B. Davis chained down to household drudgery. Or imagine Inez Millholland Boissevain becoming a dishwasher for life! Heretofore many such women have had to give up marrying altogether in order to obtain their freedom. We hold that it isn't necessary: that all that is necessary is to make a home with all the household drudgery out of it.*

Heidelberg, who chaired the Feminist Alliance's Committee on the Socialization of the Primitive Industries of Women, made some attempt to eliminate domestic drudgery through design. There would be no wallpaper and no picture moldings. All corners would be rounded, all bathtubs would be built in, all windows would pivot, all beds would fold into the walls, and all hardware would be dull-finished. Of course, the women with high school training in domestic science would still be cleaning inside the built-in bathtubs, if not under them, and washing the pivoting windows.

While the planning progressed, the project was criticized from outside as a

"feminist paradise palace" by Laura Fay-Smith, writing in the *New York Times*. Fay-Smith sneered at feminism and railed at women who refused the "responsibilities" of motherhood. A militant anti-feminist, she argued that if nature had intended women to be feminists, then women of the future would be square-shouldered, flat-chested, and equipped with "large feet on which to stand their ground." They would be born with "money as their only standard of value." Fay-Smith asserted that true women know their place is at home, as mothers, because this was what nature had ordered. She fired a parting complaint: "The feminist wants to hire other women to do what she ought to do herself; she wants to climb on the shoulders of the women whose hard necessity compels them to be paid servants." In her portrayal of conflict between women as employers and employees, Fay-Smith did identify a problem that the feminist organizers could not resolve: how to escape from stereotypes about "women's" work without exploiting women of a lower economic class.

The debate which followed Fay-Smith's article, however, centered on whether or not a feminist apartment hotel promoted or destroyed "natural" motherhood for middle-class women. No critic picked up on Rodman's scrutiny of "natural" fatherhood, and asked what "real men" ought to do around the house. No one extended Fay-Smith's criticism to ask how "professional" domestic workers could also be mothers. No one asked how the professional women who were supporting themselves and their children could survive without their jobs. In the last rounds of the debate, the editors of the *New York Times* actually agreed with the Feminist Alliance's assertion that removing housework from the house was desirable, but the editors reproved the activists for mixing up this technological

and social advance with feminism, "whatever that may be," and thereby "making a difficult problem harder."

Ultimately the alliance between elderly, wealthy women interested in suffrage and philanthropy and younger women and men who were cultural radicals, socialists, and feminists broke down. "Motherhood" had been the point of public attack, but the unresolved problems of domestic service versus domestic cooperation caused the group's internal disagreements. The struggle to unite socialism and feminism was at a very early stage. Feminists with capital who could afford the new physical environment for collective domestic work never thought of voluntarily sharing that domestic work themselves. Men and women with socialist sympathies who defended the Feminist Alliance's project in *The Masses* had no analysis of the conflicts of either gender or economic class involved in reorganizing domestic work. Not one feminist woman nor one socialist man in Rodman's group (with the possible exception of her husband) wanted to do any domestic work. Talk as they might about the dignity of labor, or about creating good jobs for well-trained workers, no one wanted to be a well-trained domestic worker. Everyone wanted to pay someone else to do this job, but they were never prepared to pay more than they earned themselves as writers, or teachers, or white-collar workers.

The inability of Gilman's followers to build the Feminist Apartment Hotel did not affect Gilman's own career very much. She had already moved from writing political polemics to utopian fiction, the genre of the 1890s at which she was particularly adept. *What Diantha Did* (1909-1910) was succeeded by *Moving the Mountain* (1911). A final utopia, *Herland* (1915), depicted economically independent, wise, and athletic women in an egalitarian society with marvelous architec-

ture and landscape architecture, a society without men. *Women and Economics* was still considered a "bible" by college women, and many women's groups around the country were attempting to put some of Gilman's ideas into practice, with the establishment of community dining clubs and, especially, cooked food delivery services, rather than more expensive apartment hotels.

Like her many predecessors interested in linking feminist ideology and housing design, including Melusina Fay Peirce and Marie Stevens Howland, Gilman had identified economic independence for women as the real basis for lasting equality between men and women. Like them, she had argued that the physical environment must change if women were to enjoy this economic independence. But despite basic agreement among many domestic reformers on these issues between 1870 and 1900, no single reformer, before Gilman, had been able to speak to a very broad range of supporters. Only she was able to make the dream seem so tangible, so sensible, so extraordinarily realizable to people of common sense and good will, that tens of thousands of people began really to believe in new kinds of American homes.

Although the dream was broad, the experiment was narrow. The failure of her disciples to create a viable experiment in New York may be traced to Gilman's optimistic rather than realistic view of women's employment patterns. By 1910, 25 percent of all women were employed, and 10 percent of all married women. Gilman's hoped-for constituency of professional mothers was to be drawn from this 10 percent. But she organized against the odds: in 1910 only 12 percent of all

employed women were professionals, while 40 percent were still domestic servants. Professionals who were also mothers were an infinitesimal group compared with single professionals, or with domestic servants and factory operatives who were mothers. True, the professionals were increasing their numbers dramatically, and the married ones among them represented the fondest hopes of a new generation of educated women who did not wish to sacrifice their careers for motherhood. However, they were the exceptional women of their time. The housewife who did not work for wages was still the typical married woman, and the majority of professional women did not marry.

A second obstacle to success was Gilman's and Rodman's choice of the expensive apartment hotel, with its commercial services, as the setting for feminist motherhood. This created difficulties for the Socialist Party women, who found that Gilman's program left them without suitable tactics for organizing servants and housewives. Gilman depended on female professionals and female capitalists to lead the way. Not only did she reject class conflict, which the Socialists knew how to analyze, but she also rejected housewives' economic struggle and argued that housewives did not perform productive labor in the Marxist sense. Although she had the best analysis of feminist motherhood yet developed, she failed to convey to Socialist Party women the full force of earlier feminist arguments about the economic value of unpaid or low-paid domestic work.

Gilman did aid Socialist Party women to fight cultural conservatives within the party, such as John Spargo, who argued

that housework was a woman's job. Spargo had a particular hatred for feminist proposals for collective living, stating that "A glorified Waldorf Astoria is inferior to a simple cottage with a garden." But Gilman merely helped Socialist women to defend a feminist critique of the private home, not to take this further into a socialist feminist plan for action among domestic workers.

Gilman's great contribution to the feminist and socialist movement of her day was a powerful critique of "the isolated home" and "the sordid shop," of "a world torn and dissevered by the selfish production of one sex and the selfish consumption of the other." Accompanying this critique was her remarkably vivid presentation of another, more humane, social and physical environment—the feminist apartment hotel suitable for feminist motherhood.

Although Henrietta Rodman and her colleagues in the Feminist Alliance never built Gilman's feminist apartment hotel, the history of their unsuccessful attempt to find a constituency for a "feminist paradise palace" provides a cautionary tale for modern feminist architects who would like to transform the private homes in capitalist society. Domestic work must be reorganized equitably, in terms of both class and gender, before the domestic workplaces can be redesigned.

\*This brief extract is from Dolores Hayden's new book *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981).

Dolores Hayden, an architectural historian, is Associate Professor of Urban Planning at UCLA.

# Kitchen Culture/Kitchen Dialectic

Joan Greenbaum

*The kitchen is the most important room in the home for me. I guess I feel comfortable here and other people do too. It's more informal. I like the aroma and the idea that people can find me here or that I can find others when I need them. It's a social space. Did you ever notice how easy it is for people to talk when they are cooking or cleaning up after a party?*

*I hate the idea of having to produce meals on schedule. You know how it gets when the kids are hungry and everybody needs something at the same time. Sometimes it can be pure chaos and there I am in the midst of it dreaming about the beautifully clean kitchens they show on TV. Why is it that they always show sparkling clean kitchens and push ads at us to make us compare ourselves with such perfection?*

**T**hese two statements, by the same woman, indicate the strong but ambivalent ties between women and kitchens. The contradictions and confusion this woman voices are common, for the kitchen is a space which stands on the threshold of the public and private spheres. There is no clear line of demarcation.

Over the course of this century the home, with the kitchen at its center, has changed a great deal. Like the work world, it has become more regimented, more routine, more codified. Since the turn of the century women have heard calls for

efficiency and cleanliness issued by outside "experts" and have shaped their kitchens accordingly.<sup>1</sup> Yet, to an amazing extent, the more personal aspects of family life, particularly the values placed on nurture and friendship, have stayed and made a permanent home for themselves in the kitchen.

If we look at the kitchen as a crucible of change, we can see aspects of the larger society intensified in its heat. Social relations have been molded to fit the needs of monopoly capital. In the work world we see clock-oriented efficiency determining the way workers relate to one another.<sup>2</sup> As workers are pressed into a routine, their social contacts become less personal. Within the home women's activities both comply with and defy the social relations dictated by capitalism. While the layout of the kitchen has been rearranged to promote more "efficient" home operations, the relationships that take place within it still carry elements from a more personal, pre-capitalist society. Despite their isolation within private households, women have had a powerful impact on social values, in particular on the way we relate to each other. It is for this reason that women's relationship to the kitchen, the emotional center of the home, has become the target of much outside manipulation.

A dominant feature of kitchen design has been its separation from the rest of the house as an isolated unit. While recent

trends have reintegrated the kitchen within the home, the concept of one kitchen per household still influences design. The physical size of the kitchen has also changed, shrinking and swelling several times during this century in proportion to the activities rooted there. Focusing on form, we can point to the disappearance and reappearance of the big kitchen table, the decline and fall of pantry walls, the march of counter space as it enveloped work areas, the emergence of streamlined appliances. And parallel to the alterations of the physical space, we see transformations affecting the activities within the kitchen: woman's role shifted from producer to consumer; women entered and were ushered out of the labor force only to reenter again; family size decreased; household composition was redefined; servants vanished and men made their presence felt.

In viewing these changes, we see a rather clear pattern emerge. As woman's role shifted from producer to consumer, the home was brought into the money-based economy.<sup>3</sup> Women are now expected to purchase most of what they formerly made. Everything from bread to complete meals is sold as a commodity, making the family more dependent on waged income. Even the kitchen itself has become a commodity as cabinets, appliances, and "design packages" are marketed to fulfill the dream of the "perfect" kitchen.

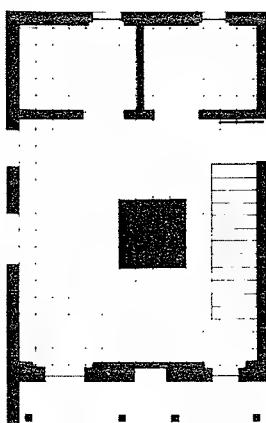
## Turn of the Century: A Woman's Place . . .

*She was verging on a break-down. He volunteered to help get breakfasts and supper, but when he found how poorly organized the kitchen was he had to buy her a kitchen cabinet to organize the food storage [advertisement for McDougall cabinets, 1919].*

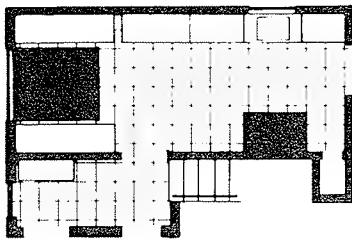
For the first two decades of this century, the cast iron stove and large kitchen table dominated the kitchen, as they had for years before. As the ugly duckling of the private home, the kitchen was kept under the stairs or tucked away in the corner.

By the First World War, kitchen design was beginning to change. The stove shrunk in size and became easier to use. Servants looked for and found less demanding and demeaning labor. Housewives, encouraged by the suffrage movement, claimed more freedom in daily actions and began to move out of the kitchen into the world.

But the swing toward liberating women from the kitchen was slowed by a deluge of social prescriptions decrying the demise of the family and stressing the need for women to stay at home. Women's magazines campaigned; "experts" spoke out; and domestic science literature, the forerunner of home economics, took workplace efficiency measures and clamped them to the home. The home was to be the bastion of family life, the kitchen its command center, and the woman its sergeant. The large wooden table remained literally at the center of women's activities.



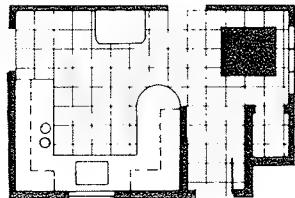
### The Twenties: The Family That Eats Together . . .



*The large old-fashioned kitchen with its singing kettle and purring cat is disappearing. It is no longer a family sitting room and general workshop. The kitchen is shrinking in size. This is significant. We all recognize that many old time crafts once carried on there are now only a memory, and that much of the actual cooking has gone to the factory and the food shop* [Good Housekeeping, 1925].

In the 1920s the white enamel kitchen table sat squarely in the middle of the room. There it served as a work surface before the age of counter tops. Around it moved the woman of the house who, according to the women's magazines of the day, was anxious to learn about the advantages of electric refrigerators, gas ranges, and new methods of meal preparation. Breakfast was eaten here, or in the budding "breakfast nook." So was the children's lunch. But dinner—the socially reinforced American tradition—was to be eaten in the dining room. In the midst of the increasingly mechanized kitchen the table remained a relic of an earlier social heritage—the place for homework, after-school snacks, tea or coffee with "the girls." Any function not formally assigned to the parlor or dining room stayed in the kitchen.

### The Thirties: Gather Round the Table

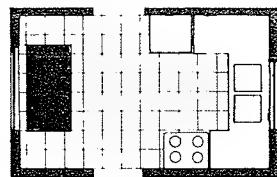


*The kitchen has come into its own again. It is in high favor with the whole family. Father admits that cooking is his hobby, and is being called "Household Epicure No. 1." The children invite their guests into the kitchen for a "cook-your-own-party," and Mother is glad to give them the run of it for the evening* [Good Housekeeping, 1935].

Films and advertisements reflected the kitchen's central role. Movies appealed to fantasy as stars tap-danced over spacious kitchen floors. Appliance manufacturers played on wish fulfillment in hard selling the American kitchen. Ads for new products painted pictures of wondrous new kitchen worlds with shiny linoleum floors, sparkling appliances, and bright colors. These ad campaigns intensified the trend toward installment buying. Appliances that had formerly been considered luxuries were now pushed as necessities.

At the center of all this remained the kitchen table. Now perhaps a little chipped or in need of repair, it was covered with oil cloth. Yet it continued to serve as the base of family operations, with discussions taking place around it. As the Depression deepened and the parlor and dining room became a little more frayed or too hard to heat, the kitchen table reigned supreme. For those who found themselves in a new apartment or house, however, counter tops were beginning to take some of the strain off the already overloaded table.

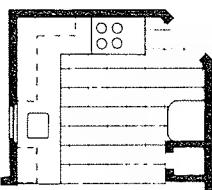
### The Forties: Small Is Beautiful?



*We had the latest in post-war housing. It had one of those efficiency kitchens that were beautiful to look at but, god, you couldn't move in it* [woman speaking about 1948].

Those of us who came of age in the forties' kitchen remember it best for its astonishing lack of space. After the war, experts agreed that economic demands left room for little besides a "functional" kitchen. The need for housing, the tight economy, and the tighter supply of building materials led to what "mass production engineers" thought the perfect answer: the small, workable kitchen with stove, refrigerator, and sink in a work-saving "U" or "L" shape, complete with built-in cabinets, counter tops, and possibly, just possibly, a few extra feet for a small dinette table. Eating was allocated to the dining alcove (no longer its own room) and social functions were pressed into the now central living room (no longer the parlor). This arrangement was to hold for another decade, until those habits and customs that just didn't fit anywhere found their way back into the kitchen.

### The Fifties: Out of the Frying Pan . . .



*Despite its size, the kitchen was the center of our four-room apartment. While we were incredibly squeezed for space, what with three kids and lots of visitors, the kitchen was the place where they would all come first. I think that I tried to make it so that my children could always feel comfortable having their friends in. There was always food—even on the tight budget—and there were always people in my kitchen* [woman commenting on her 1950s kitchen].

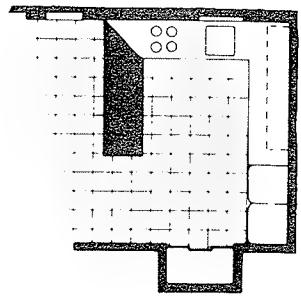
By creating the efficiency kitchen, builders had almost wiped out those harder-to-define activities that had traditionally taken place in the kitchen. In the single family home the "rec" or rumpus room was quickly carved out of the basement to take the spill-over from the cramped kitchen. The kitchen table had lowly or nonexistent status during these years. Pushed into a crowded corner, it barely served for meals and provided little physical or emotional space for social activities.

Builders had solved the space problem with smaller kitchens. Now manufacturers found the answer to cooking in less space—prepared foods. In 1953 Swanson introduced the frozen TV dinner, an event which not only ushered in the age of frozen food, but may have changed the American way of eating. Although canned and packaged foods had been around since the early part of the century, the notion of completely prepared meals was to alter our concept of cooking, and perhaps even our taste.

## The Sixties: The Island Emerges

*Then, like now, realtors knew that the first thing a woman asks before she looks at a house is: "Can we eat in the kitchen?" [a woman realtor commenting on the 1960s].*

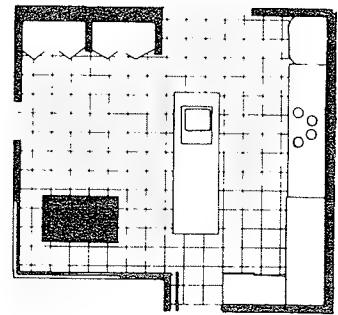
As the fifties' split-level grew into the sixties' raised ranch, the kitchen regained some of its former weight and size. In the older pre-war homes, pantries and back porches were incorporated directly into the kitchen's domain, and in post-war tract houses the family room grew up alongside the kitchen. The small kitchen experiment had not worked; even in tiny apartments designers were forced to at least open the kitchen up to the dining space. Walls tumbled down as people remodeled their kitchen areas. A generation weaned in crowded quarters wanted room to grow in. But they made some marked changes. An entity called the "island," long the darling of home design magazines, came of age. The center of gravity shifted. People no longer sat around the kitchen table; they stood around the island or peninsula counter!



## The Seventies: Health Food and Microwaves

*It's critically important to me that the kitchen be the spot where my kids and their friends can be comfortable. But there is a big difference between the way my mother used the kitchen and the way I see it. She served people in the kitchen. Guests were welcomed in, but it was her space and she dominated it. In my kitchen I've tried to arrange it so that the kids and their friends, as well as my own friends, can help themselves. Even the island I just had built was put in for that purpose. It kind of encourages people to pitch in and help [daughter of 1950s woman].*

The seventies saw activities in the kitchen cum dining room cum family room expand still further. Informal dining and entertaining became as common for the middle and upper classes as it had long been for the working class. The island stood out as the only line of demarcation between work space, eating area, and social/recreational place. Gone were the fixed walls and rules separating dining room, living room, rec room, and kitchen.



With the seventies, we enter an era where convenience foods, fast food restaurants, and microwave ovens have become major food suppliers for the household. Yet, at the same time, health food counters are springing up in supermarkets—right next to the rows of chemically preserved packaged food. While newspaper and magazine articles tout the wonders of intimate family life through home cooking and kitchen entertaining, statistics show that people are eating more fast food meals than ever before.

These events didn't happen willy-nilly. At each step of the way women were encouraged, through advertising and the mass media, to become contented home-makers. As technology was introduced to lessen the physical burden of home chores, ideology was injected to convince women that the home and its occupants were her most important "product." The emphasis was on the emotional fulfillment of home-making. Women in their "efficient" kitchens were supposed to produce better meals for their loved ones. The thrust of this ideological message served both capitalism and patriarchy, for contented home-makers would purchase more products, stay out of the labor force, and be so concerned about their family's welfare that they could be domesticated into submissive roles. Or so it seemed. But the image of the contented housewife has crashed into the reality of what women want for themselves.

Our memories of the past are important in shaping our present and molding our future. Generally people, and women in particular, remember their childhood

kitchens more clearly than other spaces in their lives. For the most part these memories are intense and peppered with warm spots. And it is this remembered kitchen space that influences the environments we create for ourselves and our children.

Our lives at home have been stamped by technological advances. Waves of ideology have sought to keep women comfortably confined within the home. We have been bombarded by advertisements that make us feel guilty if our kitchens are not cleaner than our neighbors'. And we have been encouraged to be active consumers, even to the point of buying entire kitchens to fit the latest style.

Yet the kitchen is still the place that makes us feel "at home." It is still the repository of feelings that are often out of place in the outside world. The fact that women have been able to keep these aspects alive in the midst of external pressures is a remarkable feat. That the effort to preserve these social relations has had to come out of isolated, privatized homes has only made the task that much more difficult.

1. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1979).
2. For a discussion of scientific management and its influence on the workplace, see Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); see also Joan Greenbaum, *In the Name of Efficiency* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).
3. Heidi Hartmann, *Capitalism and Women's Work in the Home, 1900-1930* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1974).

Each plan is from a book of house plans commonly available during that decade.

*Joan Greenbaum teaches at LaGuardia Community College and the New School. She likes to spend time on the porch of her Victorian house but often ends up in the kitchen with her four children.*

# Electricity Is Her Servant

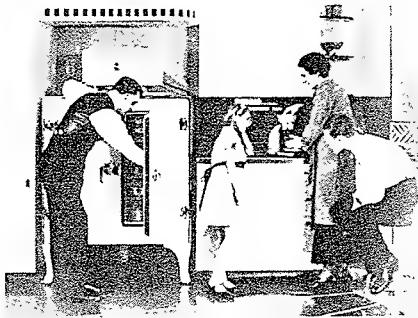
Carol Barkin

The gadget-filled, wired-up American dream kitchen that continues to pervade home-decorating magazines and the fantasies of much of the population has many powerful antecedents. It received one of its biggest boosts in the middle of the Great Depression, when most people worried about having food on the table rather than whether there was an electric mixer on the counter. In April 1935, *Architectural Forum* published the winning entries of a competition sponsored by General Electric for the design of "The House of Modern Living." An analysis of the competition program, the jury selected to pick the winners, and the entries themselves reveals the cultural stereotypes fostered by industry that have dominated kitchen design in 20th-century America.



The fictional Mr. and Mrs. Bliss at home with their son. *Architectural Forum*, 1935. Used with permission of *Architectural Record*.

"The House of Modern Living" was to house a fictitious family named Bliss. Mr. and Mrs. Bliss and their small son appeared to live in a never-never land where the Depression did not exist. Mr. Bliss was a 32-year-old engineer who liked sports.

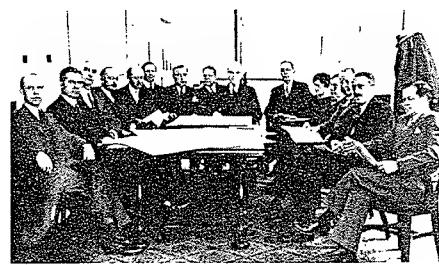


The Bliss family ten years later in their appliance-filled kitchen. *Architectural Forum*, 1935.

In the evenings he worked on sketches for inventions, played bridge, or read a book. He was a man who liked a place for everything and everything in its place. Mrs. Bliss, a housewife, had gone to the same college as her husband, where she had prepared herself for her future by majoring in home economics and child training. She did her own housework because "financial circumstances preclude an all-time maid... [and]... she actually enjoys the work."<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Bliss believed in using the best labor- and time-saving equipment so that she would have spare time for her child, for friends, and for shopping.

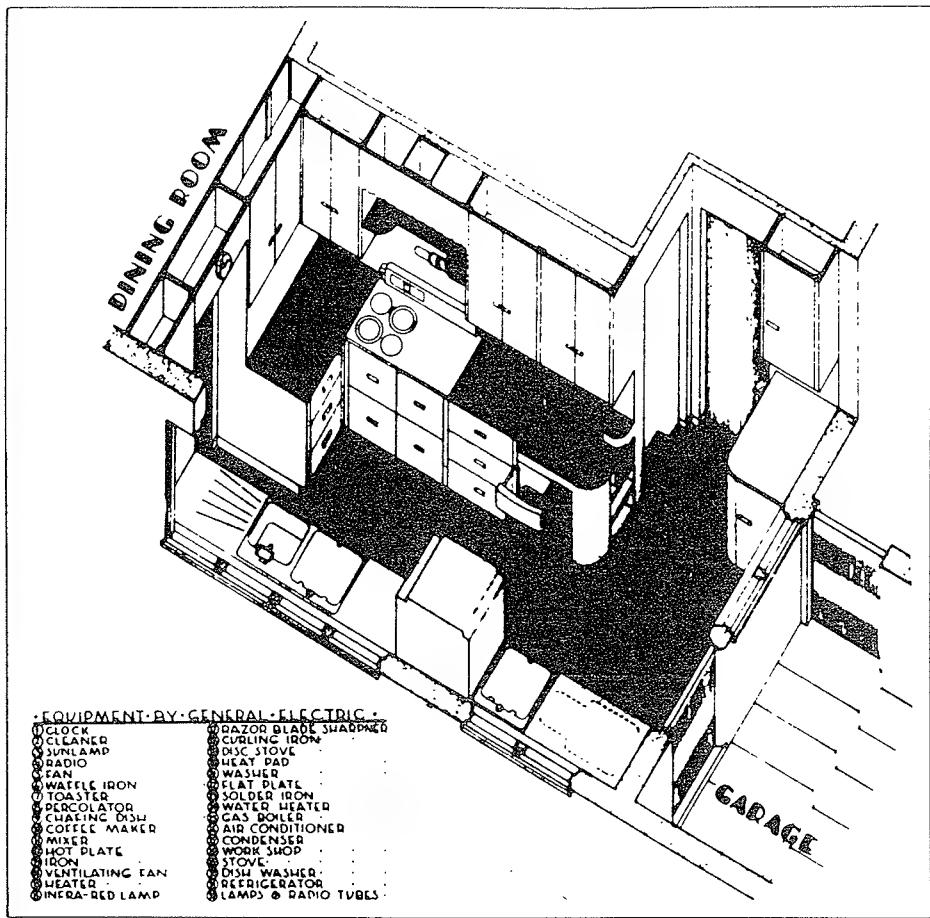
The competition was divided into two phases. For the first phase entrants were asked to design a house for the Blisses and their four-year-old son. In the second phase the Blisses were ten years older. Their 14-year-old son now had a younger sister, age nine. The other addition to the family was a live-in maid, placing the Blisses among the less than 1% of all households with full-time help.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Bliss, still a skilled housewife, now had more time for "women's clubs and various social activities."

Since the competition's stated aim was a serious attempt at improving housing design, careful attention was given to the selection of the panel that would evaluate the submissions. The jury, as it is called in the architectural profession, was composed of seven architects from the seven major geographic areas in the United States. An expert in child training, a domestic scientist, a general contractor, and a real estate man "expert in the field of the small house" were also included "to insure that the selections would be completely realistic."<sup>3</sup> After a lengthy and glowing description of the architects and the realtor, the *Architectural Forum* article stated that "two of the nation's best known women, Katherine Fisher, director of the Good Housekeeping Institute, and Dr. Grace Langdon, child expert from Columbia, contributed the women's angle."<sup>4</sup>



Jury members for the House of Modern Living Competition sponsored by General Electric in 1935. One of the two women jurors is not pictured. *Architectural Forum*, 1935.

With little paid work available at the height of the Depression, 2040 architects entered the competition. The rules required floor plans, an exterior drawing, and one interior perspective of a basement playroom, a kitchen, or a laundry room. The architects who entered overwhelmingly chose the kitchen for their interior perspective. Perhaps they assumed that the winning "House of Modern Living" selected by General Electric would have to be packed with appliances and gadgetry and the kitchen afforded the best opportunity to show this.



The kitchen and electrical equipment schedule submitted by the Grand Prize winner in the House of Modern Living Competition. *Architectural Forum*, 1935.

The grand prize winner played all the right hunches. Like many other entrants, he designed a modern, flat-roofed dwelling that *Architectural Forum* acknowledged was "perhaps some years ahead of popular acceptance."<sup>5</sup> He chose the kitchen for his perspective presentation and managed to cram 32 electrical devices manufactured by General Electric into his house plan. The equipment ranged from a refrigerator and stove to a razor blade sharpener.

Although the jurors paid no special attention to the kitchen, the "efficiency" of the winning schemes appears to be related to the number of electrical devices shown. The idea of electricity as the savior for overworked women was as unrealistic as Mr. and Mrs. Bliss themselves. In 1932 only 27% of all homes had a washing machine and only 11.5% had a refrigerator.<sup>6</sup> By 1935, with the Depression continuing in full force, there is no reason to believe that the statistics had changed significantly.

In all of the published schemes the kitchen was designed as a separate space closed off from the rest of the house. The designers seem to have made the assumption that Mrs. Bliss would work in isolation. In the grand prize winner's solution,

there was a laundry and small planning desk incorporated into the kitchen, reinforcing the idea of the housewife as "captain" of the domestic ship. The isolated kitchen derives from an earlier time when servants were accorded a separate domain. The first phase of submissions for the "House of Modern Living" made no attempt to redefine the kitchen for a servantless family but rather merely reduced the size of the kitchen and substituted Mrs. Bliss for servants.

The array of appliances manufactured by General Electric and other companies was born out of the dreams of early tinkers who saw mechanization as the solution to the drudgery of housework. Also helping to define the modern kitchen were home economists, frequently women, who sought to make housework more efficient and to raise the status of domestic labor to that of a science. The goal of these domestic professionals was to help women to become competent housewives rather than to liberate them from their labors. Like the two women on the competition jury, they had interesting careers convincing women to be happy working at home.

The winning kitchen might seem too efficient or sterile by today's popular stan-

dards. Women's magazines in the intervening years since the competition have promoted the warm, cheery kitchen with French country or cozy Colonial styling. Moreover, the family room began to appear in later houseplans, purportedly bringing women out of the isolation of the kitchen. Yet increased family togetherness did not result in the sharing of domestic chores to any appreciable degree. The cultural assumptions about women and kitchens implicit in the General Electric competition continued to be promoted by women's magazines and manufacturers of domestic items until they came under question by the feminist movement in the early 1970s.

There have been other proposals for freeing women from the kitchen besides the notion of labor-saving devices. One was to provide meals outside the home. Fast foods and frozen dinners began to be marketed in the 1950s as modern "conveniences" for the housewife. They have become necessities in the 1970s for many working mothers, despite the expense and poor quality of much convenience food. Another alternative was a communal sharing of work, where a few did the cooking for many. With the exception of some experiments in the 1960s, this idea has mostly been ignored.<sup>7</sup>

Even today most women continue to work alone in their kitchens, aided by as many appliances as they can afford. (In 1970 only 19% of U.S. households had a dishwasher.<sup>8</sup>) Women are still the chief cooks for their families; the main difference being that today most women help pay for the food as well as prepare it.

1. *Architectural Forum*, April 1935, p. 274.
2. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975). Extrapolated from Volume I.
3. *Architectural Forum*, April 1935, p. 275.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 281.
6. Albert Farwell Bemis, *The Evolving House*, Vol. II (Cambridge: MIT Press), p. 67.
7. For a discussion of these alternatives see: Dolores Hayden, *The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976) and Dolores Hayden, "Challenging the American Domestic Idea," in *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Susana Torre (New York: Watson Guptill, 1977).
8. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Housing, 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970).

Carol Barkin has a Master of Architecture from UCLA and is currently a free-lance designer and teacher.

# Environment As Memory

## An Interview with Donna Dennis and Maureen Connor

*The following is a condensation of a conversation among two artists, Donna Dennis and Maureen Connor, and two members of the Editorial Collective for Issue 11, Debby Nevins and Jane McGroarty. The work of both Dennis and Connor is directly inspired by imagery connected to architecture and the domestic environment. For the past eight years, Dennis has made small buildings, many of which have been houses or motels—the domestic environment on a public scale. Connor's organdy sculptures are based on intricate, traditional napkin-folding patterns. These fabric sculptures are self-supporting; their structural strength is a result of the folding process.*

**Debby:** The making of art can transform, conquer, and exorcise emotions. What are your autobiographical associations to your work? Does your work have metaphorical content?

**Donna:** I moved quite a bit when I was young. When my father got back from World War II, we moved to Washington, D.C. My mother somehow couldn't make a break with her parents; my mother and my sister and I would spend every summer in Ohio while my father stayed in Washington, except for a few weeks when the family took a vacation together. We would just set out by car without hotel reservations. We would drive to the Rockies or somewhere else in the West. There were often times when it would be getting dark and we would go past all these motels with the "No Vacancy" sign turned on. It was a very special time in a way; it was sort of scary yet I was with the family—secure and insecure.

There was also a tradition of being interested in architecture. My mother, coming from Ohio, always wanted to go to New England and see the architecture. We would go through these old New England towns and she would say, "Look at that door," and I thought, "Yuck"—you know, the Williamsburg kind of thing. Somehow I felt my own kind of interest. I was attracted to the sleazy places. I also have an early memory of going to Boston and visiting the Old North Church. I must have imagined it being like one of those restored houses that she liked. It was in a slum and really decrepit and I felt sorry for it. My emotional connections to architecture have a lot to do with the work that I do.

As I became involved in architecture, I started noticing certain buildings in New York. I'd see an old storefront, all mirrors and beautiful; then it would have a "For Rent" sign, and later I would see the building torn down... and I must have felt as if I had a mission to do a piece about its being forgotten.

All my pieces take me a year. I may do maquettes and drawings. I like that a piece involves an entire year of my life. I'm completely self-taught in construction. In the *Two-Story House* I built, I built the roof of the porch three times before I got it right. Three whole roofs. But there is a part I really like to do—the surfaces, the tiles. It is really very meditative. I can sort of rest in between—trying to figure out how to do a roof or something—and I just paint or rule off these squares and then I paint them.

**Jane:** In working on a piece for a year, which has repetitive, meditative parts, does the history of its making affect you later?

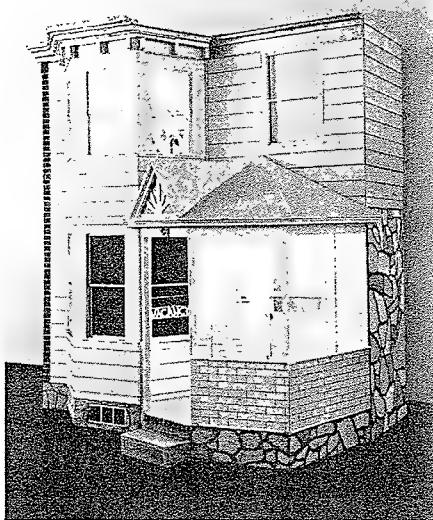
**Debby:** I was wondering if you remembered the making of the work in a personal sense, connecting specific parts of the building with specific events or feelings in your life?

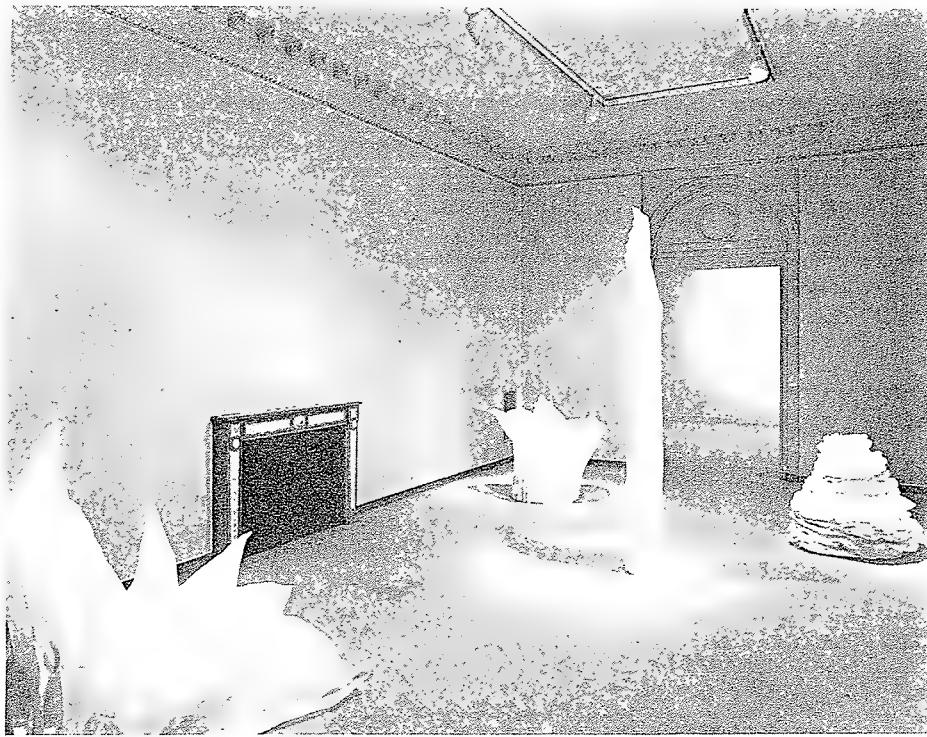
**Donna:** A friend of mine died when I was about halfway through making the *Two-Story House*. When it was finished I dedicated it to him. He had liked it a lot and it became a memorial. He was 35 and the first friend of mine who died. I am just at the age when you realize that you are going to die one day. I thought a lot about the room upstairs with the light—it was a place for him spiritually. The downstairs was more public. The whole piece, in the end, meant something about going on. The house was painted and looked like something that was going through a renovation and was about to take on a new life. One could imagine that it had been a private home and somebody new had bought it and it had just gotten a fresh paint job.

**Jane:** Your work is architectural in a sense, but the scale is not architectural. How do you arrive at the size?

**Donna:** When I made my wall panels in the late 1960s, they were 10 feet tall. Then, when I first became involved with feminism, I decided that I had been trying to seduce the male world by working so large. A lot of men were doing big art. So I began to work in my own size. The hotels were 5' 8½" tall—my height. I still use that scale.

Donna Dennis. *Two Stories with Porch (for Robert Cubuzio)*. 1977-79. Mixed media. 126" x 120½" x 85". Photo by D. James Dee. Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery.





Maureen Connor, *Column A*. Photo by Wolfgang Hoyt. Courtesy Acquavella Gallery.

Maureen Connor, Installation view, 1980. Photo by Wolfgang Hoyt. Courtesy of Acquavella Gallery.

**Debby:** Maureen, what kind of autobiographical associations do you make to your work?

**Maureen:** In my family, women were always setting elaborate tables and making fancy meals, especially my grandmother. I remember great concern about what was put on the table—the right kind of tablecloths, the right kind of napkins—and all that.

The work is certainly about transformation. It is also about the idea of pushing the limits of fabric—how far could I push without anything in there doing the supporting? For me it was really a metaphor—fabric being very fragile and delicate.

**Debby:** A metaphor for what?

**Maureen:** For myself... this fragile thing that is being pushed as far as it can go and is able to stand up and be tough.

**Debby:** Would you want to, for aesthetic reasons, go bigger?

**Maureen:** I would. In fact, I had the idea of seeing if I could actually try one that was tent size... a small architectural scale; especially like the pleated column (*Column A*). That piece has a lot of layers, each layer supports the next layer, and each layer is a little bigger. I wondered how many more layers I actually could put on that piece and still have it stand up. I have never seen any other structural use of fabric like this napkin folding where the fabric is the structure and doesn't need any other support.

**Jane:** It is like folded plate construction where the planes of the material provide support rather than sticks holding things up.

**Debby:** Do you think of your work as feminist?

**Maureen:** Yes, I do, but especially on the personal level. Pushing the limits of fabric reflects my own feelings of being pushed, pushing my female side. I see it as the inverse of macho, so feminine yet tough. For me napkin folding is one of the most beautiful things that I have discovered that women did, that women invented. Men certainly invented some napkin-folding patterns, but it is clearly a woman's tradition, a woman's art. Women made all those folds and created those objects, except, of course, the waiter in a restaurant. However, women's forms of expression carry a certain history of oppression, like the napkin-folding tradition. What are they, if not partly symbols of oppression? Women made these beautiful objects that were destroyed the moment people sat down to dinner. Middle-class women had the time to produce incredible ornaments because they were not allowed to venture beyond the home. Poor women would be away from their own homes folding napkins for someone else. Yet these napkins created beauty in everyone's lives and are testaments to women's skill and imagination in designing beautiful environments. Part of doing the napkin-folding pieces is for me not just a celebration of this imagination but also the recognition of the pain they express and represent.



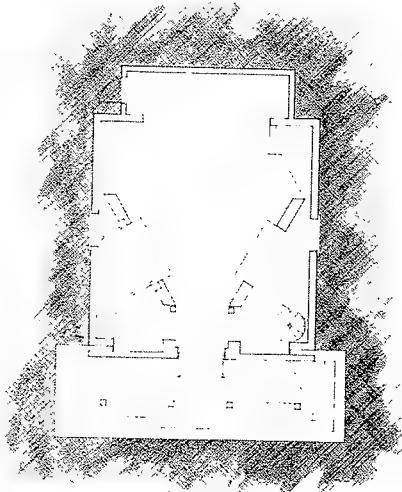
# The Bessie Smith Memorial Dance Hall

Donna Robertson

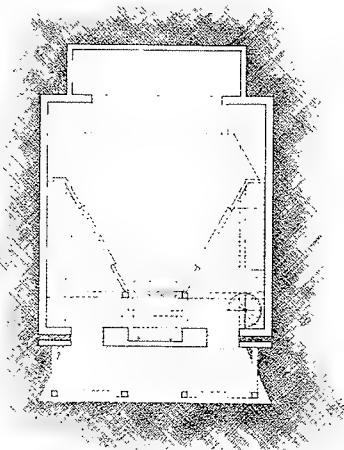
*Good morning blues.  
Blues how do you do?  
Good morning blues.  
Blues how do you do?  
I just came here  
To have some words with you.*  
—Bessie Smith

*I'm like a poor fly  
Spiderman, please let me go,  
You've got me in your house,  
And I can't get out the door.*  
—Bessie Smith, *Spiderman Blues*

*At the still point of the turning world  
There is the Dance.*  
—T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*



First Floor Plan.



Second Floor Plan.

This project deals with three main concerns: Bessie Smith, the blues, and the American monument.

Bessie Smith was born about 1898 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She grew up singing in the church until, at age 14, she met and sang for her idol Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, the most famous of the early blues singers. Ma Rainey took Bessie with her in her Rabbit Foot Minstrel Show, which toured the deep South. Bessie was able to learn all about the vaudeville techniques of the minstrels, yet her own singing retained little of their theatrical manner and relied instead on the gospel approach to singing. "When you went to see Bessie and she came out, that was it," recalled a fellow musician. "If you had any church background, like people who came from the South as I did, you would recognize a similarity between what she was doing and what those preachers and evangelists from there did, and how they moved people. . . . Bessie did the same thing on stage." Her singing style, which owed much to Ma Rainey, relied on strong "center tones," around which she would work her tune. Thus, the familiar melody of the blues tune would be reinterpreted for the audience by the singer; the traditional meaning was given new life by the expressiveness of the singer. And expressive Bessie was: "Every note that woman wailed vibrated on the tight strings of my nervous system. Every word she sang answered a question I was asking," wrote Mezz Mezzrow.

The blues grew out of a mixture of African rhythms and song, brought to America by the slaves, and an acquired knowledge of European church music. The first form the amalgamation took was that of gospel music, as sung in the deep South. Blues began when gospel was taken out of the churches into the secular realm by displaced individuals drifting about the countryside, and by field hands in the agrarian South, who planted and harvested to its rhythm. When the society of the South was disrupted by the Civil War and the economy plummeted, many southern Blacks traveled to the North looking for work. They took the blues with them, thus enlarging its venue, and they raised its status to a valid form of formal entertainment for the Black community (that is, one for which people would pay an admission charge). The blues, however, retained a seemingly salacious irreverence that made the church-goers condemn its influence on impressionable children. The blues spoke of the same matters that gospel did, but with a secular, immediate, and sexual insistence that demanded resolution here on earth. They did have a dangerous side.

The American monument acts as a reminder for its audience, whether as a commemoration of an event or person through association, or as an exceptional example of something. Both intentions aim to reinforce collective values held by the monument's audience and to allow its viewers a control over *time*, through the process of memory, and a control over *place*, through an embodiment of permanence and stability.

## BLUES

Earthly, direct, sexual.  
Homelessness, travel, loneliness.  
Related to the body, of the individual.



tension  
movement  
release  
the Dance/Communion  
fellowship, transcendence

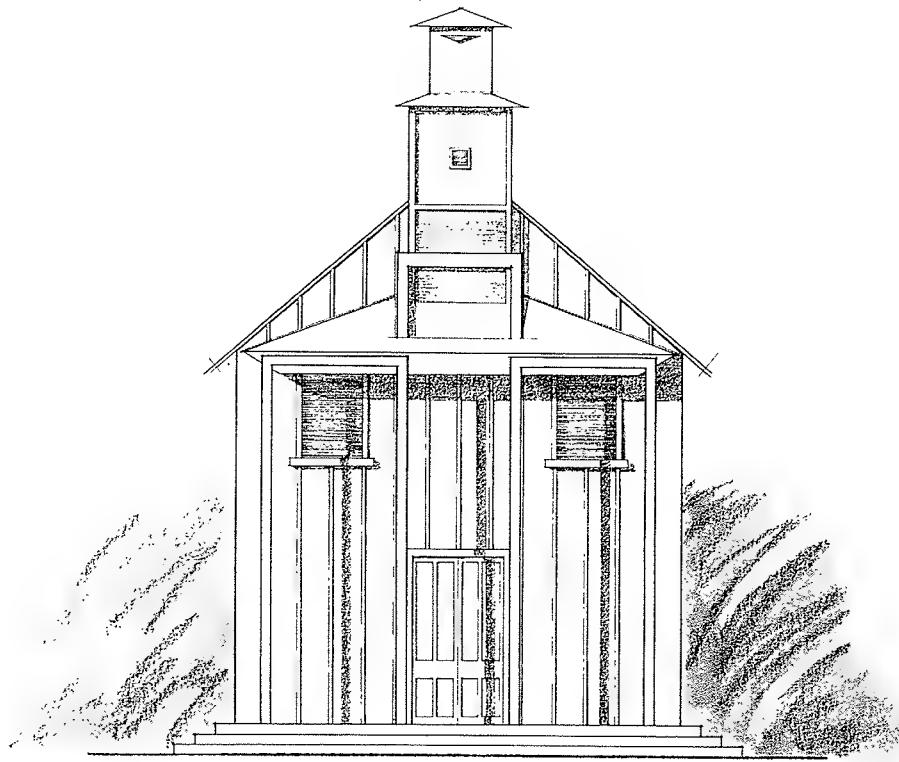
## GOSPEL

Heavenly, evocative, transcendent.  
Drawn to home and sanctuary, rooted,  
communal.  
Related to the mind, of the fellowship in  
community and God.



stasis and calm  
immobility  
Home  
Contemplation/Communion  
inner-directed, quiet

# located somewhere in Harlem



Front Elevation.

## (LET ME SLEEP ALL NIGHT IN YOUR) SOUL KITCHEN

**SANCTUARY:** a consecrated place, as of a house of worship  
a place of refuge, asylum, or protection.

The location of the Hall attempts to suggest the actuality of the abject as countered with the mythical realm it must inhabit. There is an evocativeness to the name "Harlem," associated with music, community, tempers, and the possibility that it might be like nowhere else on earth. We can't say exactly *where* the Hall might be: you could turn the corner, look into that empty lot, and there it would be. This possibility of "coming upon" the object might even serve to engage the viewer more, into a quest of sorts. The mythical realm is also a reference to the unknown region of the *dance*, when one unexpectedly "comes upon" a transcendent release.

**MEMORIAL:** a written statement of facts, or a *petition*.

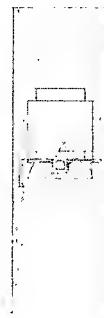
*When I was back in the Seminary,  
I was told you can petition the Lord with prayer...  
Petition the Lord with prayer.  
You cannot petition the Lord with prayer!*

*Can you find me sanctuary?  
I must find a place to dwell,  
A place for me to dwell.*

—Jim Morrison and the Doors, *Soft Parade*

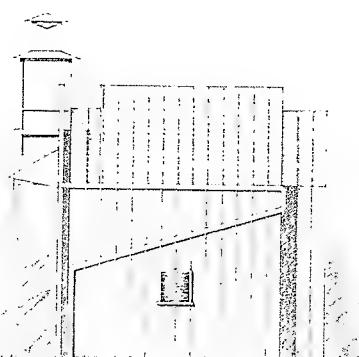
*When a woman gets in trouble  
Everybody throws her down  
Looking for her good friend  
None can be found  
You better come on, in my kitchen  
There's going to be rain in our door.*

—Robert Johnson, *Come on in my Kitchen*



Site Plan.

This building acts as an *object* that is an image of memory and experience—and so, *time*, when viewed from the outside. The journey through the object brings one to its center, the locus for the participant to lose the self in the *dance*; and so, the building becomes the spatial embodiment of *place*. Mediating between these two extremes are the two rooms, created by the intersection of the two plane geometries. They become the complement to the dance floor (the place of release); they are the spaces housing objects signifying the drawn-to-home longing of the blues and the paradoxical nature of sex that makes it part of home (a release from the self and a communion with another at the same time)—these objects are the stove and the bed. And so, there is a simultaneity and overlap expressed between two seemingly opposing elements of the blues: home versus the freedom to move on.



Side Elevation.

*When this you see, remember me.*  
—Gertrude Stein

Donna Robertson, an architect, was a 1979 finalist of the Rome Prize and a member of the design team that won the international competition for the Parliament of Australia.

# Eileen Gray

Deborah F. Nevins

"I always loved architecture more than anything else, but I did not think I was capable of it." —Eileen Gray

Eileen Gray's reflection reveals her self-doubt at the beginning of her career in architecture. Only in her mid-40s, with neither academic training nor apprenticeship in architecture, did she tackle her first project: a house. Yet, when she died in 1976 at 97, her architecture, her interior design, and her furniture stood among the most outstanding bodies of work of the modern movement.

Gray's personal biography is as exceptional as her professional one. It reveals an independent, courageous, and creative character. In this light, Gray's articulate expression of her lack of self-confidence in the realm of professional life becomes even more poignant. This, unfortunately, is a feeling held by many women whose achievements have been recognized as exceptional.

Although she did not practice architecture until her fifth decade, the first 20 years of her adult life were an odyssey toward architecture. Born in Ireland in 1879 to a wealthy family, Gray was one of the first women to attend the Slade School of Art in London, where she studied painting at the turn of the century. Soon abandoning the role of fine artist, she apprenticed herself to a craftsman who did lacquer work in London. She became highly skilled at the craft and was able to produce magnificent designs using this demanding and time-consuming process. (At least 22 coats—each one requiring 24 hours to dry—are needed to build up the glistening smooth lacquer surface.)

In 1902, at age 23, she settled in Paris, where she remained until her death. In 1913 she exhibited at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Décorateurs, and she continued to show her work from then on. By the '20s, she was producing screens, lacquer panels, and all types of furniture, as well as lamps and rugs. The work can be loosely described as what we now call Art Deco.

By the mid-20s, she was beginning to employ the more industrialized aesthetic of the International Style. Her decorative patterns became more abstract. At the same time, she also made her first architectural studies.

In 1924 the entire issue of the avant-garde Dutch periodical *Wendigen* was devoted to her work. It contained statements on her work by Jan Wils and Jean

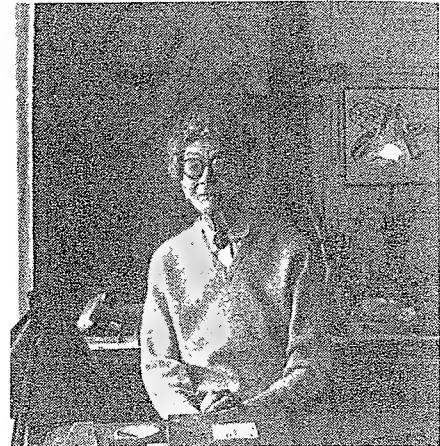
Badovici. The publication introduced her to an important audience outside Paris. Badovici became her first client.

From her own gallery/boutique, "Jean Desert," opened in 1922, she sold her limited-edition designs. Although a "succès d'estime," the gallery was not a financial triumph; it closed in 1930. Its establishment, however, was an innovative and adventuresome act, not paralleled by the efforts of any other avant-garde designer of the time. Why did she do this and what were the consequences for her?

Until very recently, it was thought unprofessional for architects to market their own designs; and in America it has only recently become ethical for architects to be developers. But when Gray opened the gallery, she was not yet actively involved in building; she had no academic or professional credentials in architecture to hold her back from becoming an entrepreneur. The fact remains that she was not taken seriously by historians and her work never got the recognition it deserved in her time. Even now, she is sometimes billed as "Eileen Gray, who had a gallery/boutique in Paris." Perhaps this is due, in part, to her role as a quasi-manufacturer. This may have made her seem a dilettante. The gallery may have failed, in part, because the shy and private Gray was not aggressive enough to pursue the publicity needed for public acceptance of any business venture. And then there was the confusion about her role: Was she a designer or was she a "vendeuse" as well as "patrone"? And there was the Depression.

Gray's adventurous spirit and the independence and the strength required to pursue her work were paralleled by her physical daring and life style. She was a pioneer aviatrix. In 1920, she was among the group that made the first airmail service between New Mexico and Acapulco. In her personal life, she was extremely independent for the time—living alone, it seems, all her adult life.

On first view, Eileen Gray's work from the mid-20s clearly falls within the aesthetic canons of the International Style. She employs its clean lines, lack of ornament, 20th-century materials, and understated elegance. But what sets her apart from orthodox modernism is the manner in which she uses this vocabulary. Her



Eileen Gray in her nineties in her Paris apartment, Rue Bonaparte.

humanistic philosophy and profound approach to the question of functionalism separate her from the leaders of the avant-garde of the '20s. Her spaces and furniture are often designed to have multiple uses, contrasting with the modern movement's mono-functional approach.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Gray's spaces are total environments, filled with her own designs of furniture, rugs, and lamps. This approach underlines many of the concerns of the modern movement, especially the Bauhaus; but in reality, it has not usually been actualized. Moreover, Gray's work is exceptional for the level of detail at which she confronts and solves a problem. When considering the use of an object in space, she analyzes every component of the physical actions or functions connected to that object, creating a design whose physical form responds meticulously to that analysis.

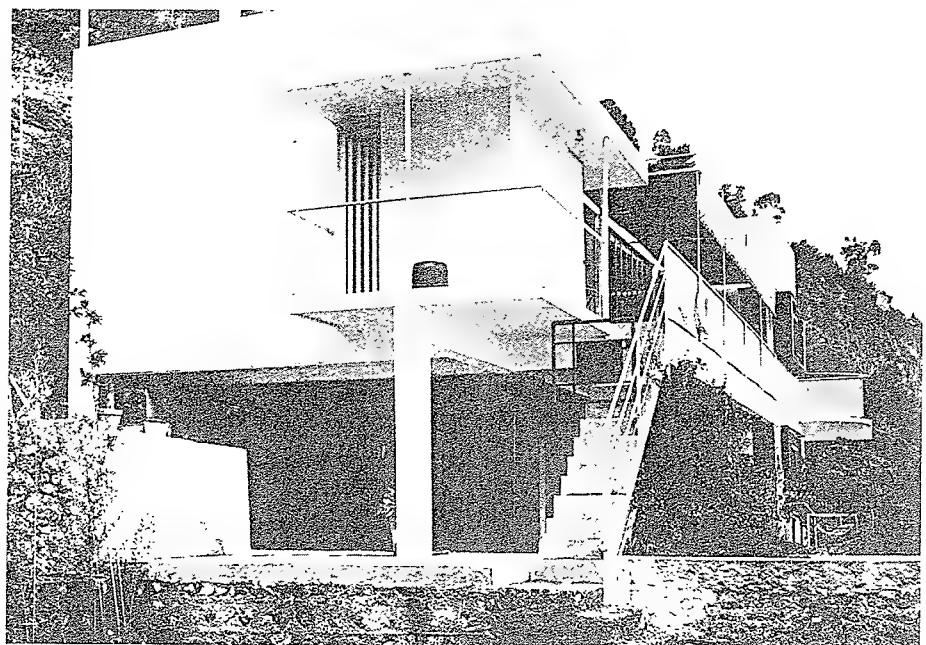
An examination of her first house, designed and built between 1926 and 1929, provides a thorough understanding of her approach and a sense of the exceptional quality and inventiveness of her work. It was called the E-1027 house or "Maison en bord de Mer,"<sup>2</sup> the title of the article which presented the house in detail in *L'Architecture Vivante*. Jean Badovici, the editor of the influential journal, was the client, and he may have had a hand in its design. The dialogue between Gray and Badovici (see below) accompanied the publication of the house in the 1929 issue.

The two-story house is situated on a rocky, sloping site overlooking the Mediterranean Sea at Roquebrune on the French Riviera. The house is a finely tuned response to the exigencies of a very specific program: a small vacation home for a single man, servants, and occasional guests. Nothing in the design is without significant meaning for the total scheme of the functioning of the house.

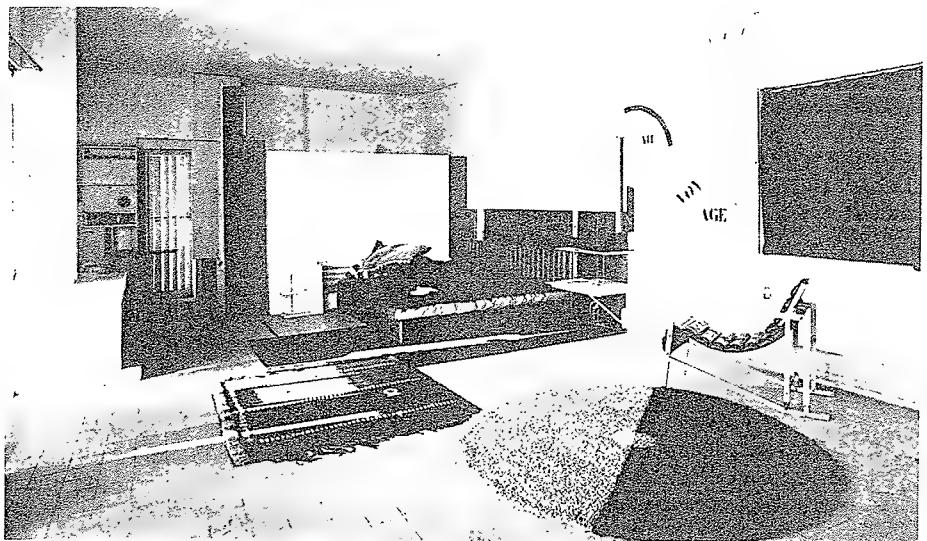
Providing isolation and privacy for guests and owner while organizing spaces for collective activity is the major theme which determines the circulation and planning of the house. This well-known concern in all architecture is treated with a sensitivity that makes for the exceptional quality of the house.

The circulation system underscores this theme. The section of the house along the slope of the site is so organized that each floor has ground-level access. Kitchen, living room, master bedroom and bath are on the upper floor; reception, guest bedroom, storage area, maid's room and bath are on the lower floor. An exterior stair off the master bedroom connects it with the lower level of the site, which is just above the beach. Another exterior stair connects the terrace in front of the living room with the ground. A door on the west opens directly from the bed/alcove in the living room to the terrace that wraps around the building from the south to the west. The guest bedroom on the lower level has its own access to the ground. Thus guest and host can move freely, in and out, up and down in the exterior system, without crossing paths. The interior spiral stair connecting the floors is in an enclosed area. Movement from floor to floor is thereby isolated, permitting private interior vertical circulation.

The living room, the largest space in the house (approximately 40 x 15 ft.), is also structured around the theme of isolation and collective activity. Privacy is ensured for this space by visually blocking its entrance from the exterior (the formal entrance to the house) with a wall/cupboard. So, even when the front door is open, as is often the case in a warm climate, the room is isolated from the porch and the foyer. Further privacy is provided by a hallway which separates the living room from the master bedroom. Yet, fitted with chairs, couches, and an eating area at one end, the room also serves as the major gathering space in the house. And in order to accommodate several guests in the small house, a bed/alcove is incorporated in the living room, visually secluded by a fireplace. The wall behind the bed is fitted with compartments for storing clothes and pillows. During the day, the bed becomes an auxiliary couch. In addition, the large couch, the major piece of furniture here, can be used as a double bed; or, since it is formed from



Roquebrune: view facing the sea.



Living room, Roquebrune.

two sections, as twin beds. A small bathroom is situated opposite the bed/alcove and is blocked from the rest of the room by a low wall. The living room thus becomes a paradigm of the multifunctional approach through its spatial articulation and the furniture it contains. Multifunctionality is evident in the other rooms as well. Master bedroom and guest room are both fitted with sinks and desks. Beds are designed with upholstered backs and are also thought of as divans.

Similar to her conceptual thinking about rooms, diversity and option are notions that inform Gray's design responses to the environmental conditions. Her work shows a sensitivity to the cyclical rhythms of the days and the seasons. Her treatment of windows is a case in point. At least three types of windows are used: sliding and folding on two sizes, pivoting, and double-hung. Some windows are protected by wooden shutters with movable louvers. The larger, floor-to-ceiling sliding and folding windows along the living room wall are shielded by awnings over the terrace. Canvas also surrounds the terrace. In the winter the canvas can be taken down to allow the sun to warm the legs of people sitting there. With this combination of window layerings and canvas to filter light and air, a finely modulated and subtle range of temperatures is possible.

The furniture designed for the house elaborates Gray's view of an environment as a finely calibrated response to human needs. In her analysis of the function of an object, she deals with a variety of ways it can be used over time. Her furniture, like her spaces, is conceived of not as isolated elements but as participants in a web of actions that make up the drama of life.

Gray understood, in a detailed way, the use of an object over the span of a day or throughout the year, integrating this understanding into her work. In the broadest sense, then, "time" becomes a component of her analysis of functionalism. As a result, many of her objects have a quality of physical transformability that amplifies or extends the number of ways the objects can be used within the primary activity they serve. Note, for instance, her small side table consisting of a metal armature and a circular piece of glass. Made during the period Roquebrune was under construction, this table is shown in photographs of the house. Cantilevered off a metal column, the glass top is secured to the column by a metal pin, which fits into a series of holes along the length of the column. This allows the table to serve as a coffee table or side table. In addition, because its top is supported only at the edge, it can slide into position as an over-the-bed table. Pulled close to a person sitting in a chair (possibly because of its open-circle base), the table can be used to serve informal meals.



Living room bed/alcove, Roquebrune.

Other objects whose use is amplified by physical transformability include a set of tables that can be connected to form a large dining table and a cocktail table with a lip around the four sides to prevent glasses from being knocked off. This table's top can be reversed and the height of the legs adjusted to convert it into a dining table.

Gray's concern with how rooms and objects are used over time led her to acknowledge, in her design, aspects of everyday life, such as the unmade bed or reading and eating in bed, aspects that had never been explored by other designers. She was one of the first, if not the first, to design colored sheets. She argued that they would provide color and beauty in a room when the bed was unmade, as it so often is. In the guest bed/alcove, she designed a small table that swings out from the wall over the bed. The table's easel can be adjusted so that when raised, the table can be used for reading; when lowered, it can be used for eating or writing. This pivoting bed table, implying the rotation of an arm from the elbow, acknowledges, as do so many of her designs, both physical comfort and human gesture as a profound inspiration. Gray noted that "it is necessary to give to the work of art the form which best responds to the spontaneous gesture, or the instinctive reflex which corresponds to its use."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to her exceptionally sophisticated attitude toward the problem of function, her designs are characterized by a quality of "body-centeredness." The primary focus of each object's design is the physical movement and comfort of the user. She also took into account the four senses, in a somewhat more pronounced and refined manner than other designers. Her use of cork for table tops eliminated the harsh, clanging sound of an object against glass; she used fur throws on beds and soft layerings of cushions to stimulate the sense of touch; she used filtered light to comfort the eye; she isolated the kitchen to one side of the house and provided an outdoor kitchen for the sum-

mer, in order to eliminate food odors from the house.

Although all chairs have a relationship to the seated anatomy, several of Gray's chairs make a more pronounced anthropomorphic reference. The transat chair is constructed of two upholstered pieces, slung from a wooden armature, thus providing both soft seating and an image of a supple person in a seated position—a metaphor of a seated human skeleton. The bibendum chair is semicircular and upholstered; it sits like a womb ready to contain a person.

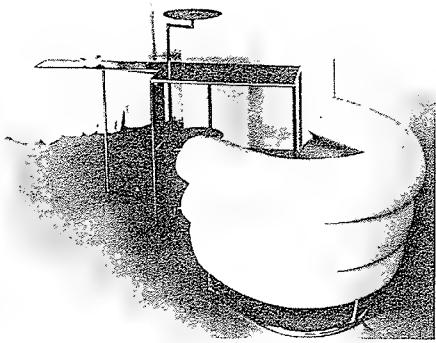
Gray described her work anthropomorphically: "Windows without shutters are like eyes without eyelids."<sup>4</sup> She called her house "a living organism." In a sense, because of the great number of objects in the house that are physically flexible, it is. Filled with objects that move in response to the body, the house is like a kinetic



Sliding and folding windows, Roquebrune.

sculpture whose design is keyed to the human anatomy.

In her writing Gray called for spirituality, symbolism, and emotion in architecture. The planning of the Roquebrune house responds to psychological needs. And in much of her decoration as well as in certain architectural details, she added a poetic and symbolic dimension. She placed the fireplace next to the living room window so that "one should see the light of the fire and that of the day at once."<sup>5</sup> The decoration of the house suggests the maritime life of the Riviera. The living room rug is executed in tones of blue and gray; a marine map on the wall can be illuminated at night to "evoke thoughts of long voyages and provoke



Bibendum chair and table by Eileen Gray.

dreams."<sup>6</sup> Many details are suggestive of boats: the striped material of pillows and curtains, the small terraces around the building suggesting the decks of a ship, a spiral stair recalling the stairs in small vessels. The compactness of the wall in the guest alcove, which combines storage, a clock, and a compartment for a pillow, is suggestive of ship's cabinetry. Throughout the house, the names of objects contained within are stenciled on the doors of closets and cupboards, recalling the use of words throughout a ship to indicate the placement of objects for the passengers and crew.

Finally, the inevitable question: Is there a specifically feminine dimension to Gray's work? We can speculate that Gray's finely tuned awareness of the way objects are used—a level of sensitivity not seen in other outstanding personalities in the modern movement—derives from a perspective traditionally ingrained in the female personality, particularly in the upbringing of a Victorian girl. Women were trained to care for the spiritual and physical well-being of others, above all else. As a result, they often have a more conscious understanding than most men of people's bodily needs and a deeper comprehension of the functioning of a house through time, simply as a result of being and working therein more than men. As has been described, Gray's work reflects this conditioning. As a woman and a nonprofessional architect, Gray was on two counts an outsider to the world of professional architects and theorists. She also lived as an expatriate. Perhaps for this reason, as well as her own perceptiveness, she was able as early as 1920 to criticize the modern movement in a way that has held widespread acceptance only since the 1960s.

The dialogue between Badovici and Gray in *L'Architecture Vivante* sets out her theories and provides a commentary on the modern movement. Its title, "From Eclecticism to Doubt," synthesizes her view of the state of architecture in 1929. In brief, although architects have rejected the eclectic aesthetics of the past, they have not yet found a mode for the 20th century that can incorporate both the spiritual and utilitarian needs of the mod-

ern age. Gray criticized her contemporaries for their rigid theory, emphasis on functionalism, and technological solutions to the exclusion of the expression of sensuality and spirituality in architecture. She did not reject the use of new technological advances nor the search for a housing prototype for the 20th century. She did warn against an oversimplification of architecture and the use of a housing prototype as a stencil for building. For her, the prototype was to be constructed in the most economical and advanced way possible, to serve only as an inspiration for housing. It should be modified by the specificity of each individual building situation. Above all, the architectural ideal had to respond to the "habits" of our time, to an understanding of the needs and emotions of the individual. This emphasis on the understanding of society's needs, the stress on spirituality, and the multifunctionalism of many of her designs set her apart from the mainstream of the modern movement.

Today architects are searching for an architecture more responsive to the needs of individuals, for a more sensual architecture, and for an architecture imbued with greater symbolic content than has been present in most 20th-century buildings. Gray's work provides a model for a contemporary architecture. The symbolism of the house at Roquebrune derives directly from the specificity of the program and of the site; the plan, too, results from the interface of her theory and the particulars of the building program. Theory never triumphs over human need. Moreover, Gray provides us with a model for a personhood of strength and individualism. And in the final account, we see that Gray did, in fact, have the ability to design on an architectural scale.

1. The Schroeder house (Utrecht, Holland, 1924) is the other main example of this approach. The upper floor can be transformed from a large open space into four partitioned spaces. Each space is fitted with a bed, cooking equipment, and sink.
2. E-1027 is a code for the names of Gray and Badovici: 10=J; 2=B; 7=G. *L'Architecture Vivante* published the house as the work of Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, in that order. Roquebrune's quality reappears in the Badovici apartment renovation and the home Gray built for herself. These later works are credited to Gray alone, suggesting that she was the main designer of Roquebrune.
3. Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, "De L'Eclectisme au Doute," *L'Architecture Vivante* (1929), p. 18.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Deborah Nevis is an art historian who writes and curates exhibitions in New York City. She is currently engaged in research on popular attitudes toward gardening.

## From Eclecticism to Doubt

*Badovici:* Do you not fear that this return to primary forms, that this systematic simplification which seems to be a law of modern art, will result in an art and especially an architecture that will be fixed in a purely theoretical and too intellectual research to satisfy both the needs of our minds and those of our bodies? The human personality is not only intellectual. And when one sees these large buildings of simple geometric shapes and even more these interiors where everything answers to a rigid and cold calculation, one asks if man could be content to live there.

*Gray:* You are right. This return to basic geometric forms, this rejection of all else, responds to certain needs. It was necessary to free oneself of an oppressive system to attain freedom. But this intellectual coldness which we have arrived at and which interprets only too well the hard laws of modern machinery can only be a temporary phenomenon. What is needed is the rediscovery of the human well below the material surface and the pathos of this modern life which up to now has been interpreted only through a sort of algebraic language of forms.

What pathos are you referring to?

The kind of pathos which is inseparable from all real life.

You mean bring emotion back?

Yes, a purified emotion which can be expressed in a thousand ways. There is no need to return to the old complicated style of the previous time; sometimes a beautiful material alone, designed with sincere simplicity, is itself enough. It is necessary to create an ideal which can satisfy a universal modern conscience while always keeping in view the joys of the individual and refraining from extremist attitudes.

Thus you are advocating a return to feelings, to emotion.

Yes, but once again, an emotion which has been purified by knowledge, enhanced by ideas, and which does not exclude the knowledge and appreciation of scientific advances. One should only require that artists be of their own time.

But how does one create the expression of an era and especially an era like ours, so full of contradiction, where the past has an influence in many ways and in which there are so many extreme points of view?

All works of art are symbolic. They interpret, they suggest the essential idea more than they literally represent it. The artist must find in this multitude of contradictory attitudes those which are the real intellectual and emotional underpinnings of the individual and the society at once.

For you, then, the architect must have a universal outlook?

Almost! But what is essential is that the architect understand the meaning of each thing and that the architect know how to be simple and sane, while not neglecting any means of expression. The most diverse types of materials are useful to express what the architect wishes of contemporary life. New materials, ludicrously employed, are as important in this as is architectural structure strictly speaking.

There is a word which you have not used but which your entire discussion reminds me of: it is *unity*. Because it is quite evident that this diversity of the elements of inspiration, as well as the diversity of the elements of realization, will result in nothing but chaotic disorder if the architect does not turn them all, and in an expressive way, toward a specific aim.

In fact there is no architectural creation, strictly speaking, which is without organic unity. But while that unity used to be confined only to the surface, now that unity has to exist as an overall factor encompassing even the smallest details.

But a unity as systematic as you suggest, would it be able to accommodate the diversity which you also spoke of just now?

Yes, clearly. It is through the understanding of the individual's desires and passions and tastes that one best interprets the life of the society and the collective order. Art is based on habits, but not on passing or, more precisely, artificial tastes which create a fashion. It is necessary to give to the work of art the form that best responds to the spontaneous gesture, or the instinctive reflex that corresponds to its use.

Do you not fear, then, that technological concerns will encroach on spirituality?

Modern designers have exaggerated the technological side. The public has already resisted these exaggerations. These excesses are exemplified by putting camping furniture, American chairs, and collapsible easy chairs in a room in the home designated for repose or work. Intimacy is gone, atmosphere is gone. One simplifies to the extreme. Simplicity is not simplification and especially not simplification done with crudity. Formulas are nothing; life is everything. And life is mind and heart at the same time.

In sum you react against the formulas which are the fashion of the moment and take a step backward.

No, on the contrary, I want to develop these formulas and push them to the point at which they are in contact with life. I want to enrich them; I want to put reality within their abstraction. Art is not in the expression of abstract relationships; it must also make concrete connection with and express the most private needs of spiritual life. Yet to sustain creativity, real scientific experimentation is necessary.

You feel that architecture should be like a symphony in which all forms of the inner life are expressed.

Exactly. Dream and action are equally important in architecture.

It is true that many of the works of the avant-garde are a little cold, but is it not because we are still under the influence of the recent past? And are not the principles of hygiene alone a little responsible for this coldness which shocks us?

Yes! We will die of hygiene! Hygiene is misunderstood. Because hygiene does not exclude comfort of action. No, the avant-garde is intoxicated by the machine aesthetic. But the machine aesthetic is not everything. The world is full of living allusions, of living symmetry, difficult to discover but real. Their intense intellectualism wants to suppress that which is marvelous in life, as their concern with a misunderstood hygiene makes hygiene unbearable. Their desire for rigid precision makes them neglect the beauty of all these forms: discs, cylinders, lines which undulate or zigzag, elliptical lines which are like straight lines in movement. Their architecture is without soul.

The architects of today scarcely talk of anything but standardization and rationalism. Can you explain to me what meaning they give these words which I often hear but whose meaning I can hardly associate with architecture?

It is always the same thing. Technology is the primary occupation. One forgets the ends while trying to think of the means. Standardization and rationalization are excellent ways to reduce the cost price; if we are not careful, this will continue to the point where we have buildings which are even more lacking in soul and individuality than those we already have now. We are in need of an ideal for architecture more than a style. But for a certain model for architecture to have real value, it is necessary that it correspond to a conception of architecture which is generally accepted, to a collective taste, to an ideal.

But how can we arrive at such a model for architecture if buildings are constructed without the least regard for an individual's need to have the place where he lives reflect his particular personality and tastes? How can architects who are concerned with nothing but the lowest cost satisfy the public taste and please the elite? Moreover, it appears to me inevitable that this system of research into ideal patterns for architecture will result in an extreme simplification and consequently in ideas which are as poor as they are limited.

The search for the building type corresponds clearly to the economic circumstances which no one alone can remedy.

Without a doubt. But again it is not necessary to present the building type as an ideal which is the result of nothing but an unfortunate circumstance.

I believe that the majority of people misunderstand the meaning of this word *type*. For them *type* is synonymous with design simplified to the extreme which is intended for mass production. But I understand it otherwise. A house type is a house whose construction has been realized according to the best technical and the least costly methods and in which the design is created for a specific situation with the most perfection. That is to say, it is like a model which is intended not to be reproduced over and over but which is used as an inspiration for the construction of other houses.

\*Excerpted from "De l'Eclectisme au Doute," *L'Architecture Vivante* (1929), pp. 17-21. Translation by Deborah F. Nevins.

# Lilly Reich

Deborah Dietsch

Many of the most significant contributions from the formative years of the modern movement were the result of male and female design partnerships: Charlotte Perriand and Le Corbusier, Nelly and Theo Van Doesburg, Vavara Stepanova and Alexander Rodchenko, Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Sophie Taeuber and Jean Arp. Generally, however, it is the male designer who is given credit. He is presumed to be the dominant personality, while the woman is relegated to the shadows as an undefined, assimilating, albeit supportive, partner. This presumption is clearly refuted by a close examination of the work of Lilly Reich. She is an architect and designer of furniture, interiors, and exhibitions in her own right, even though her work has been categorized primarily through her collaboration with Mies van der Rohe in the late 1920s and early 1930s. While much of the documentation concerning her work is currently inaccessible<sup>1</sup> or has been destroyed, her unique approach to design can be identified by looking at her participation in the exhibitions of 1927 in Stuttgart and Berlin, 1929 in Barcelona, and 1931 in Berlin.

Born in 1885 to a factory-owning

family in Berlin, Reich received her formal artistic training, beginning in 1908, at the Wiener Werkstatten under Josef Hoffmann. Although it is not clear whether she specialized in any particular medium, the workshop's emphasis on rich and precious materials in its designs for utilitarian objects and its use of geometric forms seem to have influenced her later work. Following her apprenticeship, Reich returned to Germany and joined the Deutsche Werkbund at its outset. Both the German and Vienna workshops seem to have been closely allied during these early years; Hoffmann was one of the founding members of the German workshop.

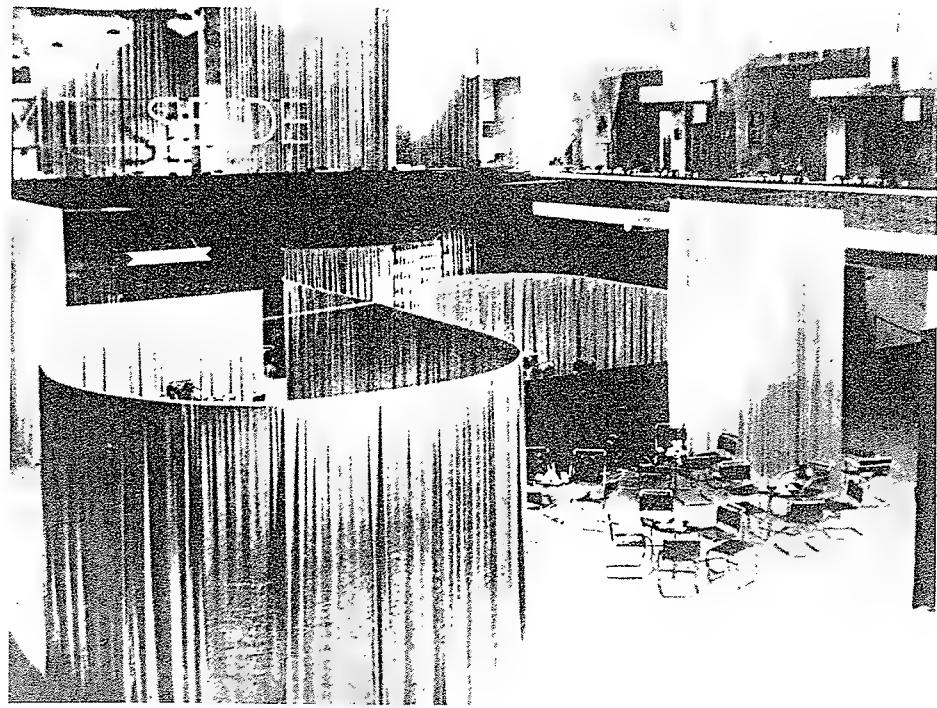
One of Reich's designs for a shop window display was published in the Werkbund yearbook of 1913. Ludwig Glaeser describes Reich's first published design as a "precise geometric arrangement" with "repetitive use of display objects... containers and tools of the pharmacist's trade,"<sup>2</sup> an approach which he attributes to her training at the Wiener Werkstatten. It should be noted, however, that this project was for a display of industrial products and not of household, hand-crafted objects; it was thus more closely allied to that faction of the Deutsche

Werkbund which advocated manufactured, standardized components in their designs than to the more 19th-century arts and crafts tradition of the Vienna workshop.

From 1924 to 1927 Lilly Reich directed an annual Werkbund exhibition at the Frankfurt fair. During this time she "called for the nomination of Mies van der Rohe" as director.<sup>3</sup> This resulted in the first collaboration between Reich and Mies, although the exact division of effort between the two architects is unclear. This initial collaboration was followed by their joint participation in the Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart in July 1927, which Mies directed as the Werkbund's vice-president. Reich had her own individual model rooms within the Mies-designed apartment block. Whether she also contributed to the actual architectural design of the block is not evident. It was in these interiors that the cantilevered tubular steel chair—the so-called MR chair—made its first public appearance, along with a tubular steel stool and a table with a circular glass top and crossed U-shaped supports. Whether these furniture designs can be solely attributed to Mies is questionable, since Mart Stam, Marcel Breuer,



Lilly Reich with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1933.



Lilly Reich, Velvet and Silk Cafe for Mode der Dame Exhibit, Berlin, September 1927.

and others had produced similar chair and table designs by 1926. What Mies seems to have accomplished was to refine the general prototypes of the period by streamlining the tubular supports so that the joints between the various elements of leg, back, and seat melded into one continuous unit. And no doubt Reich assisted in these refinements.

For the Berlin Building Exhibition of 1931 Reich designed a lounge chair with a continuous cushion, based on Mies's cantilevered chair design, along with a caned version. The stool shown at the Weissenhof exhibition was also produced in a caned version with dark tubular supports (appearing much closer to Stam's 1926 version). This is an indication of Reich's involvement with the original designs. One source attributes the choice of seating materials—leathers, velvet, and caning—to Reich.<sup>4</sup> She may also have been familiar with the club chair designs of Hoffmann and Loos from her training at the Weiner Werkstatten, and thus encouraged Mies to adopt a similar abstracting attitude toward furniture design. Certainly it is no coincidence that during his ten-year collaboration with Reich from 1927 to 1937, Mies produced all his major furniture designs—the Barcelona pieces of 1929, the Tugendhat chair of 1929–30, the Brno chair types of the 1930s. These served as his chief means of financial support at this time.

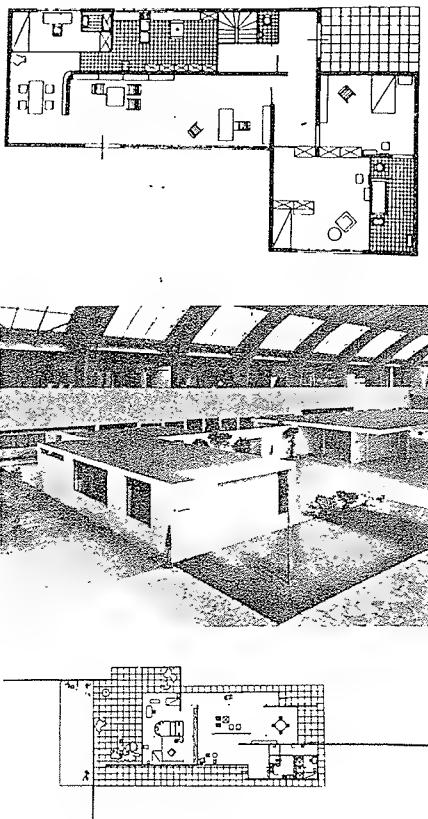
Another facet of the Stuttgart exhibition on which both architects collaborated was a display for the glass industry. Photographs reveal a stark interior: three white and black leather armchairs and a rosewood table grouped together on a black and white linoleum floor, surrounded by large panels of etched, clear and gray opaque glass. Glass was employed in a similar manner for the silk exhibit in the German section of the International Exposition in Barcelona of 1929. In this exhibit, Reich draped swags of silk in a free manner over the glass panels, which served as invisible supports. The silk thus dominated as the primary material—its curves, colors, and texture contrasting with the neutral, crystalline background of glass.

The most dramatic industrial exhibit, exemplifying Reich's attitude toward design, is the Velvet and Silk Cafe for the Mode der Dame Exhibit of September 1927 in Berlin. Instead of using backdrops on which to display the fabrics, yards of silk and velvet were draped over free-standing curved and straight tubular supports. The material thus acted simultaneously as space divider for the various compartments of the cafe, backdrop for the seating, and exhibited product. The only external reference identifying the subject matter of the exhibit was the logo "seide" (silk), which simply hung over the entire display in large letters. The colors of the fabrics—orange, red and black vel-

vet; gold, silver, black and lemon-yellow silk—added another subtly sensuous dimension to the space, a contrast to the tubular steel Weissenhof tables and chairs.

Lilly Reich has been credited with influencing Mies's use of color in his interiors, a claim which has probably been overemphasized since color was used frequently in both the interiors and exteriors of architecture of this period.<sup>5</sup> Due to the black and white photography which documents much of the architecture, however, a comprehensive understanding of the color range used is not possible. More fundamentally influential on Mies's work was Reich's use of panels—whether fabric or glass—as space-dividing architectonic elements in her exhibition designs. The curved, striped onyx wall in Mies's 1930 Tugendhat house, for example, is directly linked to Reich's curved fabric "murals" of the Silk and Velvet Cafe,<sup>6</sup> and his obsession with glass walls seems to have been derived from the use of glass in the early Weissenhof exhibit.

The Berlin Building Exhibition of 1931 further established Reich as an autonomous designer. Continuing the 19th-century tradition of using exhibitions to publicize the latest trends in architecture, the Berlin Building Exhibition displayed "every material, every method, every theory that had to do with building."<sup>7</sup> The "Hall of the Dwelling of Our Times" featured a myriad of housing types, in-



Berlin Building Exhibition, 1931. *Left Top*: Plan of house by Lilly Reich. *Left Middle*: View of houses by Reich and Mies van der Rohe joined by wall. *Left Bottom*: Plan of house by Mies van der Rohe. *Below*: White bedroom in Reich's house.



cluding a multi-unit apartment block, a duplex apartment block, and several one-story houses. A gallery encircled this hall, under which Gropius constructed a common room for an apartment block and Breuer placed his house designed for a sportsman. Although Mies was the officially appointed director of the exhibition, Reich played a prominent role as designer of the industrial exhibits, which occupied the entire gallery level. She also designed several apartment units and a one-story house. The latter, along with Mies's adjacent residence, became the focal point of the exhibition. Although connected by a wall, forming a shared courtyard, the two houses were not conceived as a unified composition. The physical connection between them seems to have been made as a gesture toward forming a communal space, to counter the criticism that these single-story detached dwellings, each to be occupied by two people (presumably husband and wife), were solitary luxuries. They inevitably stood in contrast to the more economic and functionally efficient apartment units located directly behind them.

The differences between the designs of Reich and Mies are summarized in the plans of the houses. Mies's plan combined aspects of the Barcelona Pavilion with rounded forms from the Tugendhat House into his characteristic composition of interposed sliding planes. Reich's design, on the other hand, was divided into dis-

tinct functional quadrants of entry, bedrooms, living spaces, and service areas. The wall connecting the two houses, which extended into the interior, separated the private from the more public realms of the house. In Mies's plan, however, this wall was not as crucial to the functional division of the house, being limited in the interior to a truncated plane separating the dining nook from the service area behind it.

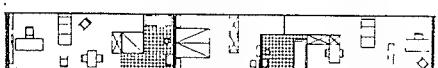
The furniture in Reich's interior was primarily from the Bauhaus workshops at Halle,<sup>8</sup> although many pieces were of her own design. Particularly dramatic was the white bedroom, which was photographed by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock as an illustration to *The International Style* for its "luxurious and feminine character achieved by combination of white materials of various textures."<sup>9</sup> The "white materials" included the velvet lounge chair, the deep pile rug, and the quilted bedcover. These various soft textures contrasted with the stark chrome and glass of the Reich-designed tables in the room. More multipurpose than "feminine," the bed could be used as a couch, the tables as desks, and the whole room easily rearranged to accommodate any number of activities. The living room also featured this multipurpose quality. Groups of tables and chairs could be arranged for study or relaxation; the only fixed element was a built-in bookcase along one wall. The dining room contained chairs designed by Reich which combined aspects of Mies's Weissenhof lounge chair and Tugendhat chairs, but featured backs contoured to the body, unlike the idealized continuous lines of Mies's chairs. The upholstered seats and backs of these chairs were supported by tubular steel runners, undoubtedly influencing Mies's 1931-35 Brno chair versions and later bentwood furniture designs.<sup>10</sup>

Other interior designs by Reich in the exhibition included two apartment units within the larger block designed by the Munich architects Vorhoelzer, Wiedemanns, and Schmidt. The simple, functional organization clearly distinguished her design from the apartments designed by Mies, Albers, and several other Berlin architects, all of whom tended to divide their units into distinct rooms. With the smallest square footage in the block, both of Reich's apartments—a studio of 115 square feet and a one-bedroom unit of 175 square feet—featured a linear layout with strip windows along one wall, thus giving the living room and bedroom equal sun exposure. The spaces for work, recreation, and meals were separated by the placement of furniture across the narrow space. With the exception of a tubular steel bed by Erwin Gutkind and the Murphy beds in the apartment by Carl Fiesen, Reich's use of tubular

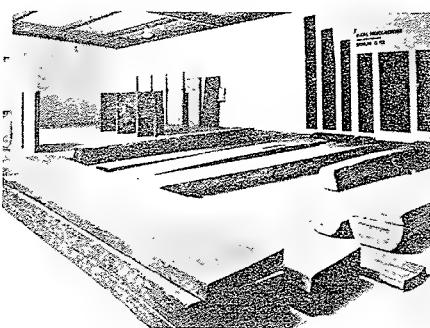
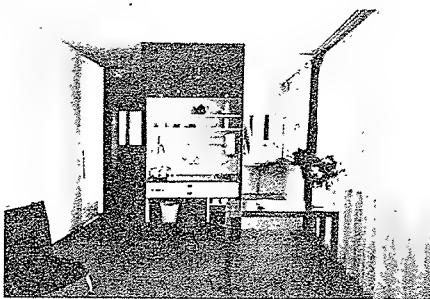
steel and convertible furnishings appeared far more innovative than the more traditional wooden furniture of the other apartment interiors. Like her single-story house, her apartments were furnished with built-in bookshelves, a leather-covered desk with tubular steel supports, a couch-bed, and Weissenhof side and lounge chairs.<sup>11</sup> The most innovative feature of her apartment units was a "cooking cabinet." When closed, it appeared an ordinary storage cabinet,<sup>12</sup> but when opened, it supplied the occupant with a complete kitchen—sink, shelves, and cooking facilities. In its extreme economy, it summarized the "Frankfurter Kuche"—the standardized built-in kitchens designed by Ernst May in his Praunheim Housing Estates.

Above these residential projects was the gallery containing the exhibit of building products also designed by Reich. Comprised mainly of interior finishing materials, the composition of the exhibition, as in her earlier designs for the Mode der Dame exhibit, the Barcelona silk exhibit, and the Stuttgart glass exhibit, was established through the materials themselves. Grouped according to type, the materials and the products included marble, timber and veneers, mirrors, paint, paper, wallpaper, textiles, assorted furniture, carpets, and clocks. Photographs of the exhibition reveal the smaller objects, such as the clocks, displayed in simple glass cases, with the larger materials placed on the gallery floor. Product labeling was limited to simple lettering, identifying the name of the materials, the supplier, and location of manufacture. Like Reich's earlier projects, this exhibit derived its power from the minimal simplicity and repetition of the raw materials displayed, rather than from an external framework of superfluous typographical explanation or product packaging.

What becomes clear from assessing Reich's work is her overall drive toward a minimal aesthetic and the constancy of this approach in all levels of her work, whether in the design of interiors or whole buildings. In collaborating with Mies, Reich was the more austere of the two: while his credo became "less is more," hers seems to have remained "even less is more." Ultimately Mies's abstraction never escaped the confines of tradition. This is especially apparent in his later projects. The buildings at IIT, for example, feature centralized symmetrical plans, a move away from his earlier use of sliding planar elements and notions of divided and interlocked spaces. His furniture and interior designs were also linked to more conventional prototypes than were the multifunctional objects of Reich's designs. The living room of his house at the Berlin Building Exhibition, for instance, displayed a traditional wing chair,



Lilly Reich, Berlin Building Exhibition, 1931. Top: Plan of linear apartment. Middle: Cooking cabinet in linear apartment. Bottom: Exhibit of building materials.



a chair type that appears again in drawings for the Hubbe House project of 1935. Most of his own furniture designs were based on historical prototypes. The Barcelona furniture with its cross-supports was derived from medieval stools and chairs, for example. His couch-bed of 1930, with its hierarchy of distinct elements—legs, bolster, tufted upholstery—appears very conventional in contrast to Reich's bed of the same year. Fashioned out of continuous steel tubing, her design consisted of two frames: one defined the top of the bed with identical "headrest" and "footboard," the other (the same frame overturned) formed the supports. The two frames were strapped together with leather to support the mattress. In this use of repeated, reversible units, her design did not recall the specificity of precedent inherent in Mies's designs, and thus could be more easily envisioned as a couch or bed.

Reich's approach to an open plan for dividing her house and apartment projects was very different from that of Mies. Unlike Mies, who used sliding planar elements to create a hierarchy of interposed spaces, Reich employed equal functional divisions within a linear progression. The living room of her house, for example, was divided by furniture grouped into areas for conversation and study. Similarly, her apartment was divided across its narrow dimension into equal areas for rest, study, and meals. The furniture could be rearranged to change these spatial divisions or to integrate the room as a whole. Mies's walls, although not establishing distinct rooms, formed hierarchical arrangements of main and subsidiary spaces that could only house fixed functions. His living room space, for example, could not serve as a more minor dining area because of its primal placement within the formal composition of the house.

After Mies became director of the Bauhaus in 1930, he appointed Lilly Reich head of the weaving workshop in 1932. This appointment seems to have been made as a token gesture. It was a post traditionally held by a woman<sup>13</sup>—even though Reich was not a weaver. While her use of textiles was always predicated on their material nature, as was her use of glass or steel, she was never involved in the actual production of textiles or interested in the craft of weaving. Although she did head a seminar on interior design, she was not involved in the Bauhaus architectural courses or the exhibit design workshop. The latter, headed by Joost Schmidt, remained linked to printing and typography, and employed an additive, constructivist aesthetic, antithetical to Reich's minimalism and reliance on the display of the materials themselves as a formal solution. Any in-

fluence or new direction she might have had within the Bauhaus curriculum was curtailed by its closing in 1933.

Little is known about Reich after the closing of the Bauhaus and Nazi seizure of power until her death in Berlin in 1947. The only recorded work from this period is a design for neon sockets for the Siemens Company in 1946, indicating that she may have been involved with industrial design in the 1940s. Despite her somewhat obscure reputation to date, Reich's design ideas have resurfaced in current architectural design. Her notion of layering different textures and materials within a monochromatic color scheme is widely used in contemporary interior design. And her approach to exhibition design, allowing the objects themselves to compose and dominate the display, has become standard display practice. Two recent examples are the draped fabrics used by Venturi in his Knoll showroom design and by Michael Graves in the Sunar showrooms. More importantly, Reich remains a key figure in our needed reassessment of the history of the modern movement. Like Eileen Gray and Pierre Chareau, Lilly Reich maintained a constant dialogue between sensuous materials and machine-made elements, whether applied on the large or small scale. Her singular vision and her practice of using seemingly contradictory materials and textures within a reductivist framework counter the current post-modern view of the International Style as a monolithic, homogeneous style devoid of subtlety and nuance.

1. The Mies van der Rohe Archive in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City includes material on Lilly Reich. Up to now, cataloging this material has been given lowest priority. The museum's policy of denying access to uncataloged matter limited the author to published sources.
2. Ludwig Glaeser, *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), p. 10.
3. *Fifty Years of the Bauhaus* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1968).
4. Hans Wingler, in *The Bauhaus* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), directly attributes the caning and rolled cushions of the Weissenhof chairs to Reich (p. 534).
5. May's Frankfurt housing and Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, for example.
6. Christian Zervos, in his 1928 *Cahiers D'Art* article, states: "The effect was one of the most ravishing, through the harmony of the fabrics and movement of mural surfaces."
7. Philip Johnson, "The Berlin Building Exposition of 1931," *T-Square* (1932). (Reprinted in *Oppositions* [Jan. 1974].)
8. From an interview with Philip Johnson (March 7, 1980).
9. Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock, *The International Style* (New York: Norton, 1966).
10. In 1935 Mies was granted a patent for a

runner chair support which he later transferred to Reich, indicating she may have been the true author of the design.

11. Philip Johnson, in decorating his New York apartment in 1930, chose to furnish it with this desk and bookcase, as well as with straw mat flooring and silk curtains designed by Reich.
12. Its design appears similar to a roll-front cabinet by S. Guttman, in an advertisement featured in *Die Form* (Feb. 1931).
13. Reich's predecessors included Gunta Stozl, who was given the title "junior master" although she headed the workshop after Georg Muche's resignation from 1927 to 1931, and Anni Albers, who was acting head from 1931 to 1932.

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# The Sharon Building

## The Transformation of Women's Recreational Needs in the Late Nineteenth-Century City

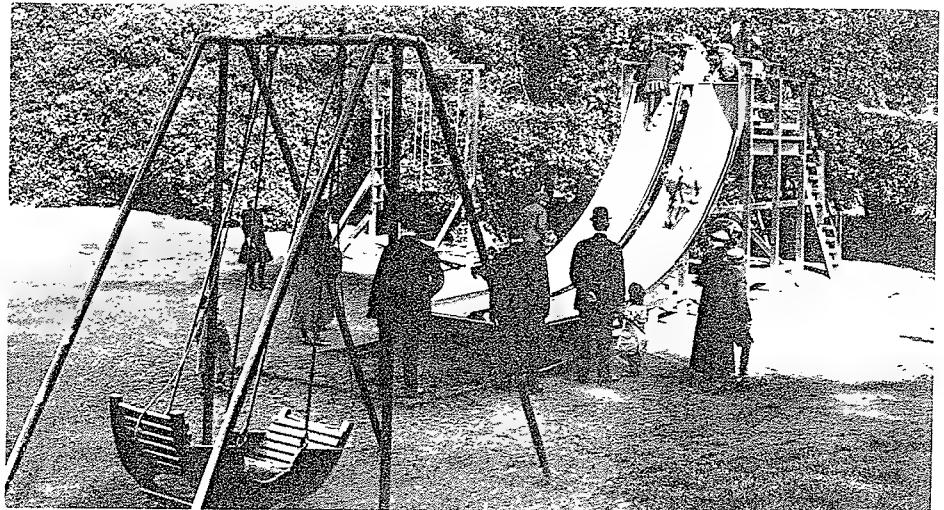
Galen Cranz

In the early 1880s, Senator Sharon from California willed \$50,000 to the commissioners of San Francisco's Golden Gate Park for the creation of monumental entrance arches bearing his name. The commissioners made a plea to Sharon's heirs, as formal marble arches were not in keeping with their vision of the park. Instead, they persuaded the heirs to build the Children's Quarter, consisting of a playground space and an informal sandstone building. This area was exclusively for children and their mothers.

The successful change in the interpretation of the Sharon bequest occurred at one of several pivotal points in American park history. This abrupt about-face reflected a larger shift in planners' ideologies as they moved from one model of the ideal park to another. The shifting ideals entailed new strategies about how best to deploy women in the ongoing effort to curtail urban problems, as well as certain attitudes about how women should live in cities. Specifically, the redefinition of the gift from memorial arches to children's building represents the transition from the *pleasure garden* (1850-1900) to the *reform park* (1900-1930).

The pleasure garden was conceived as an antidote to the ills of the rapidly industrializing city. It was characterized by a curving picturesque landscape and an emphasis on mental refreshment. Standards of order for the physical environment and for social intercourse (assumed to be set mainly by women) would help to establish white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestant values for the diverse urban population of ethnic and rural immigrants. Women's presence in the pleasure garden park together with their husbands and children would help stabilize the family unit, which was seen as threatened by alcoholism, prostitution, commercial entertainment, and boarding-house life.

In contrast, the reform park accepted industrial life and attempted to rationalize it by locating recreation near working-class neighborhoods. Physical exercise, supervision, and organization were stressed as the significance of fine art and nature appreciation diminished. For the first time sex and age segregation were institutionalized, dramatically reversing the prior emphasis on families using parks as a group. Segregation led easily to sex-role stereotyping and unequal treatment



First municipal playground in U.S. (Note the two slides ensuring separation of the sexes.)

of boys and girls. The attempt to solve the problem of juvenile delinquency also caused more attention to be focused on boys.

The pleasure garden and the reform park were followed by the *recreation facility* (1930-1965) and the *open space system* (1965-present). All four models had special implications for women's safety. In the pleasure garden, women were protected by being accompanied by men. In the reform park, safety was ensured by separating women from men. The recreation facility provided safety through police surveillance and elimination of shrubbery. In the open space system, women could only be guaranteed safety if they did not go to parks at all, went only on busy days, or went prepared to defend themselves with a martial art. In the Children's Quarter, we see the emerging reform park assumptions about women's safety via segregation in the context of a park based on the older ideal of the pleasure garden, with its concept of family use.

The idea for the Children's Quarter came from William Hammond Hall, Golden Gate Park's first designer, whose overall plan was published in the First Biennial Report in 1871 and slightly expanded in 1875. He classified the "probable frequenters of the park" into four types, each of which merited a major building. A manor house, large and elegant, would serve adults who demanded a first-class reception. The hostelry and race track were for "gentlemen who wish to

speed their horses." The cafe would cater to "large picnic parties, and very many persons who would approach the park on foot, or by public conveyance"—that is, the working class. The Children's Quarter, including a dairy and a house of refreshment and shelter, was intended for "ladies with their families, children in the charge of nurses and guardians, boys and girls, and ladies who may wish to enjoy themselves in a homelike manner." Hall physically separated this quarter from the rest of the park so that it "should not present any particular attention except to the children and those who wish to have a quiet time."

By the time of Sharon's bequest, Golden Gate Park already had a casino and speed track, fulfilling Hall's plans in part. The major lack was an informal refreshment place for women and children. The park commissioners reported that they themselves managed to convince the heirs to change Sharon's will. The heirs apparently recognized and appreciated the merit of the proposed change, which came from an existing prospectus and was consistent with the new regard for children's needs. In Hall's original master plan, the Children's Quarter had the lowest priority; it would not have been built without Sharon's donation.

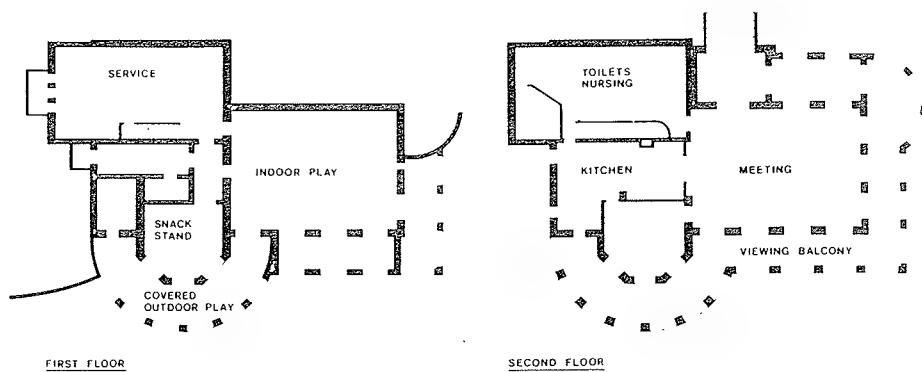
In 1885 the commissioners authorized the firm of Percy and Hamilton to design and construct the Sharon Children's Quarter, which officially opened in December 1888. The playground and building

were sited in the southeast corner of the park, which provided both easy access and visual privacy. The style of the building was Richardsonian Romanesque: three stories, with gables, turrets, asymmetrical plan, and rough-faced San Jose sandstone laid in broken courses. The siting, design, and styling expressed the ideals of informality, domesticity, simplicity, and naturalness.

The meaning of this choice is best understood in the context of the competition among proponents of three different architectural styles for park buildings at the time. Designers of the pleasure garden, such as Golden Gate Park, originally advocated either rustic or Victorian Gothic architecture. Within a few years park administrators felt that these styles looked too insubstantial for public buildings, and they turned to the Richardsonian Romanesque for its handsome, massive solidity which at the same time was unpretentious and did not dominate the surrounding naturalistic landscape. By the 1880s donors had started to prefer the more imposing neoclassical style for their memorials. Senator Sharon was part of the latter group, which favored formal, symmetrical, white, exotic, ornate, highly visible public architecture.

The stylistic issues reflected alignments with new attitudes toward public spending (public outlays should look enduring), philanthropy (donors should get visible recognition), and the city itself (the City Beautiful movement acclaimed the order of neoclassical plans and buildings). Sharon's proposed memorial gate would not have been an utterly radical departure from the aesthetics of the late pleasure garden model, for its advocates increasingly accepted neoclassical buildings and had always preferred a perimeter wall with gates to control access to the park. Yet what is most significant about the Children's Quarter is not its stylistic modesty but the type of building per se; it represented a shift in park use and recreation philosophy. Moreover, because the Children's Quarter was created before the reform park was clearly defined as a model, the commissioners had no precedent to guide them. They evolved a new set of policies on their own and—not surprisingly—*inconsistencies and contradictions* appeared.

The chief tenets of the reform park were small size, location within working-class tenement districts, subservience of landscape to architecture, formal rather than informal ground plans, emphasis on organization rather than spontaneity, and sex and age segregation rather than the use of parks by "organic, natural" groups such as families and church congregations. The theoretical justification for sex and age segregation came from developmental theory: the biopsychosocial needs



The Sharon Building—floor plans.

of sixteen-year-old boys differed from those of seven-year-old boys, and those of fourteen-year-old girls differed from both. Accordingly, designers created separate gymnasiums, showers, and playgrounds, as well as apparatus of appropriate sizes, adapted to each group's "dominant interests." Whenever a facility had to be shared, supervisors divided the days or hours between males and females. This segregation implied a bilateral symmetry, which designers used to organize the ground plans formally around an axis—the antithesis of the informal curves and intentionally ambiguous layout of the pleasure garden.

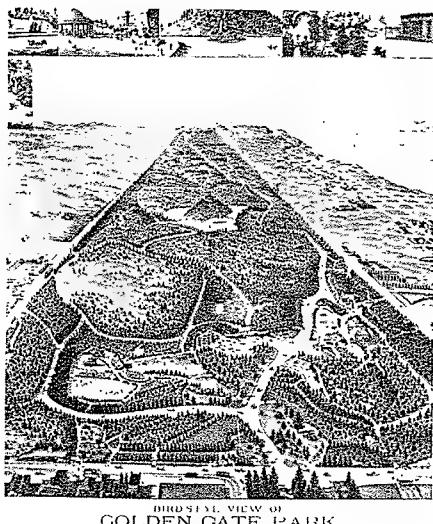
The intellectual foundation of the Sharon Building included both pleasure garden premises and reform park ideals. It was located within Golden Gate Park, an existing pleasure garden, rather than in the working-class Mission District. Due to subtle siting, landscaping remained dominant and informality was retained. Children's play remained spontaneous because parental supervision preempted an organized program of activity. The building was not internally divided into male and female areas; instead, the entire site was off-limits to older boys or men. While planners adopted the reform park attitude toward serving children as a distinct user group, they did not fully realize the implications. Reaching the city children, especially children of working-class parents, would require some consideration that they would not all be able to come with their own guardians. Hiring play supervisors is the necessary consequence of attempting to serve children whose parents are at work. Thus the Children's Quarter was designed with mixed premises: parent-child supervision, on the one hand, and a perception of children and women as having needs distinct from those of the family, on the other.

On the ground floor of the building children could buy snacks and wholesome

refreshments in a "dairy" adjacent to their playground. The second floor was reached by a ramp from the ground, which wrapped around the southern and eastern facades of the building and turned into a viewing gallery, where adults could sit and drink coffee. Children were supervised by their own parent or nurse; no day-care ratios of ten to one here! Hence, the building, overlooking the playground, had to accommodate large numbers of adults. On the veranda they could be in the company of one another, take refreshment, and still have direct visual access to their charges. The building enclosed private rooms for nursing. A married couple lived under the peaked roof, on the third floor, available 24 hours a day for assistance.

The playground attached to the Children's Quarter was equipped with merry-go-round, live donkey and goat rides, swings, seesaws, slides, springboards, and maypoles. The city fathers intended these facilities for wholesome recreation to foster moral and physical development in the city's children. In 1888 the program for the opening ceremonies expressed both an instrumental attitude toward recreation and the new idea that children were a user group in their own right: "It is believed, and earnestly hoped by the Commissioners, that many hundreds of children will be taken from our streets, and with the facilities now afforded them for moral and healthful recreation, will grow up to be better men and women."

Class harmony, a goal of so much park planning, was also a goal of the playground. According to the souvenir programs, "when enjoying these grounds, under the friendly shelter of the house, there is no distinction between the offspring of the most lowly and the descendants of the most wealthy and influential." However, the dairy concession and the rides did cost money, which limited participation to those who could afford them.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF  
GOLDEN GATE PARK  
SAN FRANCISCO

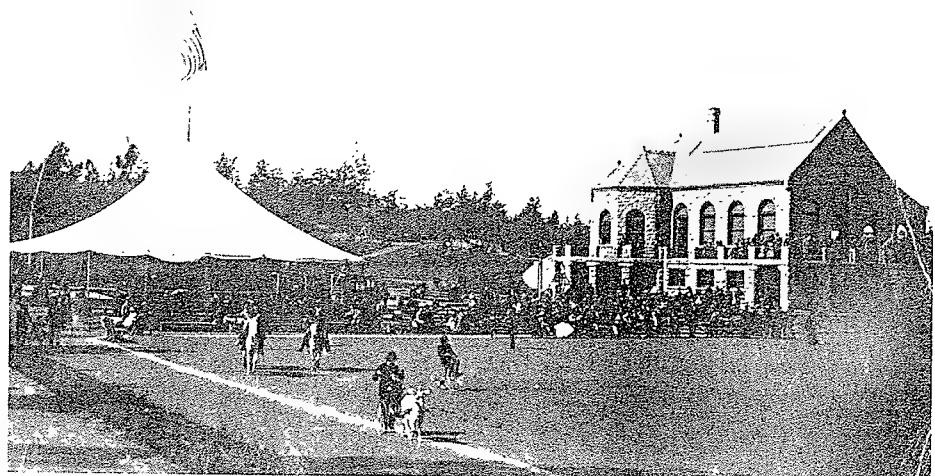
Partial solutions to this problem were to institutionalize one "free day" per year (subsidized by the park commission and the *San Francisco Examiner*) and to lower fares from a nickel per ride to two rides for a nickel.

The Sharon Building was to be only for mothers and their children, but this careful attempt to provide them with a safe and respectable environment had some consequences not foreseen by those who held pleasure garden attitudes toward family use of the parks: it kept fathers from taking a direct role in the care and supervision of their children. One indignant father wrote to the editor of the *Examiner* complaining that he was driven away from the lawn surrounding the merry-go-round and the children's swings by an officer who insisted that the ground was for ladies and children. The father pointed out:

*That means that married men who have children at play in the ground must either get a lady to watch the little ones, or the man hides in the distance, or those men accompanying their wives may look at their family from the far road in order not to conflict with the Park Ordinance which reads, "This lawn reserved for ladies and children."*

This man suggested that the sign be altered to read: "This lawn reserved for children and their guardians." However, since his views were exceptional, the park administration made no effort to include males in the supervision of children until well into the reform park era, when they were sometimes hired as play leaders.

The sex-role stereotyping of the reform park was anticipated in the provision of separate play equipment for boys and girls. Gymnastic equipment for the children's playground included a double slide, one for boys, the other for girls. Half the horses on the carousel had side-saddles. Even with these segregated arrangements,



Adults on the balcony overlooking the playground (photographed after 1900 when men were allowed in the building).

little girls were better off than before since they "never had had an opportunity of running races with each other or playing with a skipping rope, or giving their muscles exercise, or their lungs a chance to expand, just for want of such a place as this."

By 1893 newspapers took for granted that girls were the major users. In the use of swings, "Girls, as a matter of course, were in the largest majority." Nationwide, females of all ages used city parks more on their own and more actively than men had anticipated. Skating attracted women in winter climates, and on Golden Gate Park's Stowe Lake they went rowing more often than men did. In the 1880s young women everywhere began to play tennis, croquet, and basketball and to ride bicycles. Generally, women enjoyed active sports without the company of men; newspaper reporters covered this surprising turn of events with mockery and disbelief.

Men have defined women's needs for recreation and the use of other public places, and women themselves have usually accepted these definitions. However, perceived needs may not necessarily be the same as "real" needs. The assumption was, with the Sharon Building and other public places, that women needed a safe, protected, genteel setting, away from the raucous, dirty, loud, smelly, and chaotic environment of the 19th-century city and away from alcohol, swearing, and men. In reality, women were pursuing active sports on their own or with other women and girls. Accommodating these and other real needs of females might have meant a different kind of park programming.

The Sharon Building represents a historical experiment, an attempt to accommodate children and to create a safe place for women alone, in the context of a park conceived as an antidote to urban life. The Sharon Building was in most respects unique—an early and unresolved proto-

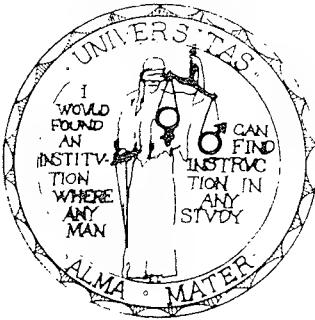
type at the cusp of the pleasure garden and reform park eras.

The reform park accepted and tried to rationalize industrial life and its division of labor by organizing users into discrete groups, using a rectilinear mode of spatial organization and institutionalizing age and sex segregation. The Sharon Building made gestures to the new ideal of sex segregation without abandoning the prior commitment to spontaneity, informality in plan, and "organic" social relations between mother and child. It stands today, albeit fire-gutted, as a material expression of a transition in thought regarding the best way for women and children to live in cities.

#### Bibliography

For a more expanded description of the four park models, see Galen Cranz, "The Changing Roles of Urban Parks," *Landscape*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer 1978), pp. 9-18. Also see her article on "Women in Urban Parks" in the special issue of *Signs* on women in cities (April 1980). Another overview of park history is Newton's *Design on the Land* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). Some writings by the leading pleasure garden designer, Frederick Law Olmsted, have been collected by Olmsted and Kimball in *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973). The development of the reform park in Chicago is fully chronicled by Clarence Rainwater in *The Play Movement in the United States* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1922). The early annual reports of the San Francisco park commissioners are rare books, available in university libraries and special California collections.

Galen Cranz has a PhD in sociology and is Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture at UC Berkeley. Her book on the history of urban parks will be published by MIT Press in 1981.



# Vignettes in Architectural Education

## *A Letter from the Ivory Tower*

Dear Reader:

I wish to outline certain problems of women faculty in architectural education. I want to write of causes as well as symptoms, but must do so only through generalizations, though these are grounded in personal recollection and collectively shared impressions. I am hopeful that you will believe me; for the trials of a woman faculty member within a department or school of architecture are formidable and incessant. She functions principally as teacher and colleague; yet she enjoys but secondary status in an often outrageously unfair world, run by and for the benefit of her male colleagues and governors.

In professional architectural education both the curriculum and the greatest prestige center on teaching within the "design studio" sequence of courses. The design studio is, in fact, the *raison d'être* of any school of architecture—just as the activity of designing remains at the core of any practicing architect's concept of his or her professional role. All other basic areas of study are auxiliary to the design studio.

I have never known nor have I ever heard of any instance where a woman has been primarily engaged to teach technical courses. If there have been such cases, I would be surprised to learn that they were anything but short-term or ad hoc appointments made by the (invariably male) chairman or dean (*Is it REALLY true that a woman lacks "the scientific mind"?*). In the secondary architectural disciplines (indeed, *because* secondary), it is in teaching *history* that women are most likely to be found. Occasionally, history is linked with "theory." But theory is an area of study speculative by definition and philosophical by implication. Given this *intellectual* thrust, it is not surprising that the teaching of theory is delegated to the studio instructor—who is, conveniently enough, almost always male (*Can women REALLY be trusted with something so SERIOUS as theory?*).

The travails of women on architecture faculties become really telling when one considers the various teaching formats: the seminar, the lecture, and—above all—the studio.

The seminar presents the least number of problems and the greatest freedom from stereotyped responses to a woman by students. This discursive situation permits the female instructor to be understood and accepted more readily as an *individual*. As the seminar is also usually the format for more specialized courses, often in history and design theory, it is usually populated with advanced undergraduate or graduate students, who tend to be more mature intellectually and socially.

In lecture courses, however, women frequently encounter the consequences of the diminished intellectual credibility society assigns to them. The format presumes that the lecturer is accepted by the students (generally a younger and far larger group) as an "authority figure" in the field. Woe to the woman who automatically assumes that she can command the lectern with the same respect as her male counterpart. Students tend to expect a theatrical *savoir-faire*—a commanding physical presence, much gesticulation, and a booming voice all help. In the absence of an orator, architectural students will happily settle for the charismatic, heroic "master designer" (a curiously *architectural* fascination). Pity the female lecturer who is neither a Barbara Jordan nor a Le Corbusier. Many of these problems are without question reinforced by the continuing reluctance of schools of architecture to invite female lecturers to speak in their guest-lecture series or to include us as participants (let alone moderators) in symposia. All this unreasonably enhances the vulnerability of the woman who finds herself a lecturer.

Yet the problems women face in the lecture hall pale by comparison with the design studio setting. It is in the studio where issues of credibility and control are most acutely felt, principally because of intense and insidious sex-role stereotyping. How can a woman match her students' expectations of an omniscient (male) design "guru"? In format the studio is the opposite of the lecture situation; it involves the most intimate, personal contact between student and teacher. You might think this to be the ideal situation for a woman to be accepted on individual, not stereotyped, grounds. But you would be quite wrong.

The design studio mentality originated in the atelier format of 19th-century architectural apprenticeship. Especially in its *charrette* aspects (when students devote themselves to the completion of a project, often for days on end without sleep), the studio remains vestigially symbolic of the sadomasochistic initiation rites undergone by pubescent boys desirous of entering into professional manhood. The architectural studio presupposes a "captain-at-the-helm," "cloak-in-the-breeze" type of instructor—a supremely *male* figure commanding respect through sheer presence. For those male studio instructors who fail to meet this authoritarian, father-figure ideal, a suitable substitute is the architectural "coach" rousing his team to victory, a "comrade-in-arms" or avuncular "buddy-figure" willingly standing by his students while they forge through the muck and mire of aesthetic creation. The studio critic is thus the quintessentially male architectural *persona*, and it stands to reason that the female studio instructor has an inordinately difficult time demonstrating (should she ever care to) either that she is as much a "buddy" as her male colleagues or (heaven forbid) that she is entitled to the same respect.

A woman's presence as a studio instructor is taken neither as seriously nor as authoritatively as that of her male colleagues. Almost invariably she is hired to teach in the lower-most years of the design studio sequence (*the "elementary school" syndrome*). Often she is called to task by her students for unquestionably trivial infractions, which (not surprisingly) would be overlooked in a male. An alleged offense might be an occasional overly complex design assignment (or an overly simplistic one). Or there might be a vague feeling that she is playing favorites by seeming to spend more time with some students and less with others (*Does it have anything to do with mother's not paying enough attention?*). Normal attempts by female critics to enforce the usual level of rigor in the studio (including final grading) may be perceived as untoward and unfair (*father disciplines; mother comforts*). The double-standard survives, as expected: all such assumed transgressions are far more readily excused in the case of male critics.

Many of the problems facing women in architectural education are shared by women in other academic fields. Difficulties with male colleagues arising out of competitive fears, inability to separate sexual from professional spheres, reduced credibility, imagined intimidations, and all the rest are by no means unique to architecture. Yet all these issues (and more) are certainly exacerbated in architectural education because of the intensified *machismo* ideal long associated with the role of the architect in society (*Remember Howard Rourke?*). To design a building—indeed, to *build* a design—continues to confer the semblance of immortality. I suspect that in architecture schools, which tend to have faculties populated with male architects doing little actual building, ego problems, resulting from secret professional frustrations (*Those who cannot DO, TEACH instead??*), become all-the-more exaggerated by the presence of women on the faculty.

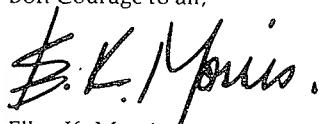
I write to you from the ivy-covered halls of an institution long-hallowed in the world of architectural education. A landmark class-action suit on behalf of all women academics at this university was recently filed in federal court—poignant testimony, indeed, to countless frustrations and unconscionable mistreatment throughout this university, and in academia everywhere.

Yet it is clear that many of the dilemmas women face in architectural education, if not in other fields, could be vastly ameliorated simply by the sustained recruitment and retention of far more female faculty (especially as design critics). The "male persona" of the studio critic can, I am certain, be de-mythified. The more women faculty there are, the more likely we are to be perceived in individual rather than generic terms. The affirmative action program at this university ensures that there is one woman on this architecture faculty at any given time (*I assure you, more than one at a time is sheer miscalculation*). In so many university affirmative action programs it is hiring that seems to be the sum and substance of the commitment made to women (*But what of reappointment? Promotion? TENURE??*). The "revolving door" policy used by most male academics to bring women to the faculty, only to force their exit peremptorily once they have served their token use, is simply no longer acceptable. All this, and here too—at a university whose *president*, mind you, last year proclaimed publicly that:

*I regard affirmative action as an imperative—both moral and social. . . . We should value the enrichment which the increased presence of such persons has already brought to our community. It is that enriching influence we seek to expand and "nurture" [my emphasis] through our affirmative action efforts.*

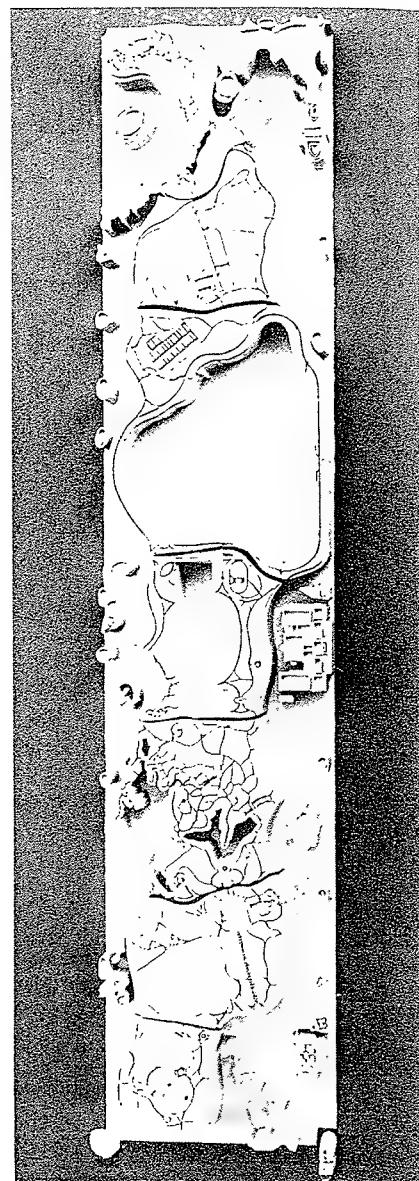
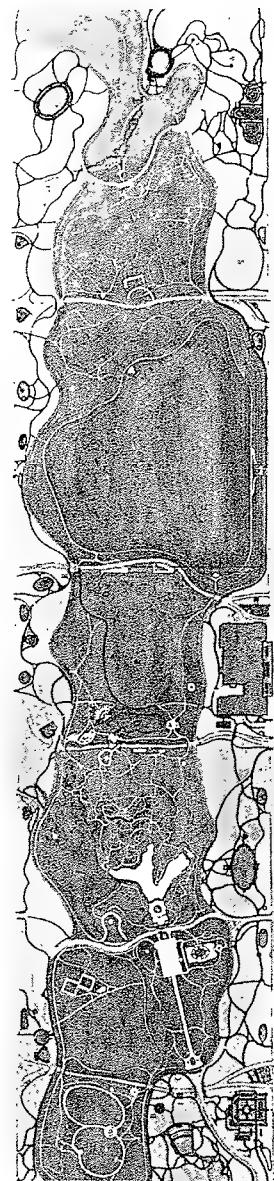
Spare me such hypocrisy!

Bon Courage to all,



Ellen K. Morris  
Assistant Professor of Architecture

Ellen Morris, a professor of architecture and architectural critic, is currently editing an issue of the Journal of Architectural Education.



# *The City Within the Landscape*

*Lorna McNeur*

In this project Lorna McNeur proposes that Central Park stands for Manhattan Island itself. She argues, through a series of drawings and a model, that if the plan of Central Park were blown up to the size of Manhattan, the park's crossroads would coincide with the city's main cross-town thoroughfares and the Grand Promenade with Broadway. The first drawing outlines the perimeter green drive. This outline, which encloses a space separated from the hard edges of the rectangle, resembles that of Manhattan Island. The Grand Promenade, lined with formally planted trees along its axis, leads to a space that resembles, in character and

composition, a mansion—designed for every member of the public in order to instill a sense of ownership of the park. Vista Point is the culmination of the Grand Promenade, just as Columbus Circle punctuates Broadway at Central Park. The second drawing shows that, like the city, the park contains "neighborhoods" outlined by roads. These "neighborhoods" have their own special character, given by the landscape and the different kinds of activities within each precinct. The model, designed to reveal the city that McNeur imagines exists within the landscape, shows the location of the old, rectangular reservoir (included in the original design).

This rectangle is located within Central Park in the same place where Central Park would be if inserted in a map of Manhattan. McNeur's original interpretation of Central Park suggests that nature and the city are not antagonistic conditions: that the landscape can mirror the city and thus transcend its status as a wilderness that can only be conquered by suppression or enshrined in a display. (S.T.)

*Lorna McNeur designed this project as her thesis for Cooper Union School of Architecture. She is currently with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and will exhibit at Artists Space in 1981.*

# Beatrix Farrand at Dumbarton Oaks

Diana Balmori

Dear Larry,

In this peculiarly wild time I tried to get to your office within the half hour and reached there at quarter to five, but you had already fled five minutes before. It is too bad not to have had the chance of speaking to you, as I am off again to the Oaks on Thursday and shall not be back in New York until late on.

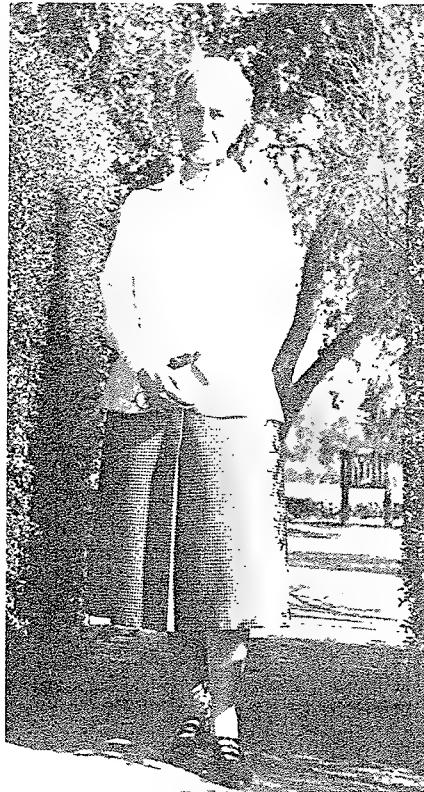
Very sincerely yours,

Beatrix Farrand

I came across this letter in the McKim Mead and White file at the New York Historical Society while doing research on architectural offices. It was the first time I had seen the name Beatrix Farrand. The letter was filed under the design job "Bliss."<sup>1</sup> I discovered that the Bliss residence, "the Oaks" in the letter, was Dumbarton Oaks, the estate in Washington, D.C., famous as the site of the founding of the United Nations. Beatrix Farrand was the designer of its gardens. I also discovered that she had designed 200 other gardens, some for a list of clients that reads like a social register—Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, J. Pierpont Morgan, Edward Harkness—and some for those who thought that having a Farrand garden opened "certain social doors."<sup>2</sup> During most of her long professional life, from 1896 to 1948, Beatrix Farrand could turn down work. Yet she is unknown today.<sup>3</sup>

Beatrix Farrand, née Jones, lived from 1872 to 1959. She received her professional training at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, from its director Charles Sargent, but she had no official connection with the university. Professional training in landscape architecture was not offered until the 1900s, but Farrand received the best training available at the time—largely straight horticultural training. She was also educated by her travels, which included visits to gardens in England and Scotland.

Farrand's professional and social con-



Beatrix Farrand.

nections enabled her to be in the right place at the right time in landscape circles in America. Memoirs on Richard Hunt by his wife Catherine Howland Hunt include an entry:

*The party went out from Grand Central in two private railroad cars, consisting of Mr. Charles McKim... Miss Beatrix Jones [later Farrand], Mrs. Charles Sargent.<sup>4</sup>*

It was 1892, and the private railroad car party was going to see the Columbian Exposition in Chicago before it opened. Burnham and Olmsted<sup>5</sup> would meet them and give them the royal tour. An entry dated two years later in the Hunt memoirs reads:

*At the end of February Richard [Hunt] spent a week at Biltmore, Mrs. Cadwalader Jones and her daughter Beatrix being of the party.<sup>6</sup>*

So Farrand saw Olmsted's last two jobs as they were being designed and built: the

grounds of the Columbian Exposition and those of "Biltmore," Vanderbilt's estate in North Carolina.<sup>7</sup>

It was not Olmsted, however, but two women who were the main molders of the ideas and forms of Farrand's gardens. This is a rare instance of a professional woman with female role models. One of these women was Farrand's aunt, the novelist Edith Wharton;<sup>8</sup> the other was the English landscape architect Gertrude Jekyll.<sup>9</sup> The influence of both Wharton and Jekyll can be seen in Farrand's one extant garden, Dumbarton Oaks.

This is the garden Farrand considered "the best and most deeply felt of a fifty-year practice."<sup>10</sup> It consists of a series of walks around a hilly site. The house sits on the highest point. The garden's design concept resembles Edith Wharton's description (as will be seen later) of the gardens of Italian villas—a series of rooms for outdoor living. One look at Dumbarton Oaks' plan reveals at a glance the variety of sizes and shapes of its outdoor "rooms." Different materials define each space: stone, brick, box hedges, etc., and in each the planting scheme is varied to create a different mood.

There is an order to the kind of spaces or outdoor rooms. Close to the house, the spaces are formal; gradually they move to greater and greater informality as distance from the house increases, until at the edges the planting almost blends into the natural park which surrounds the garden.

No one path takes the garden-walker around the whole garden. Rather, there are a multiplicity of paths which go to a multiplicity of gardens. From a few places in the garden one gets a glimpse of a large vista, but as an idea the garden is more a series of magical spaces.

Farrand received the commission for the Dumbarton Oaks garden in 1923 when she was 51 and already had a long list of gardens to her credit.<sup>11</sup> The commission for this 54-acre garden, of which only 16 acres remain, came from Robert W. Bliss, U.S. Ambassador to Sweden, and his wife Mildred. (They returned in 1931 to a nearly completed house and grounds.) The site already had a house on it, which was altered and expanded by Lawrence G. White of McKim Mead and White, the son of architect Stanford White. The interiors were given to archi-

pect Ogden Codman, Edith Wharton's co-author on her first book, *The Decoration of Houses* (1901).

The real client, however, was not Ambassador Bliss, but his wife Mildred. She would send her own drawings of facades and plans to the architect.<sup>12</sup> During the course of the project, she and Farrand were to become close friends.

For the Dumbarton Oaks job, the landscape architect was given an unusually prominent role in the design process. The garden was not to be designed after the buildings. On the contrary, White had to get Farrand's approval on the siting and design of each new part. She had a say in the placing of the major addition—the music room (which later became famous as the place where the United Nations was founded). In a letter to White of July 1926, Farrand noted:

*A further letter from Mrs. Bliss suggests that it may be well for you and me to discuss the various schemes not only for the music room but the loggia arcade and its surroundings.*<sup>13</sup>

And in October of the same year:

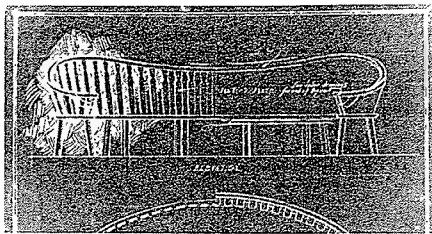
*A long cable received from the Blissses says they have cabled you the acceptance of the woodshed and west wing plans and regarding the living room and that they are willing to reduce the loggia to eight feet if desirable. Will you therefore be so very kind as to try the narrowing of the loggia to eight feet and see whether it seems to materially spoil the scheme which you and Mr. Cox had in mind; and if eight seems impossible let me know what reduction you feel can be made without disaster.*<sup>14</sup>

There seems to have been a weekly report to the Blissses, for White sent a copy regularly to the Farrand office during 1926-27. It was during this time that the layout for the different outdoor spaces was being decided upon: that of the north vista, for example, in front of the music room:

*Thank you for the copy of the letter to Mr. Bliss containing your weekly report. Sketches continue in my office on the troublesome north vista question, and I hope, before long, will be sufficiently advanced to show you on one of my next visits to New York.*<sup>15</sup>

The north vista and the music room decisions were intertwined, and Farrand was clearly in command of them.

The correspondence with the client gives a picture of a painstakingly thorough method of working. Farrand seems to have tried out everything with models and mock-ups, not just drawings. She presented many alternatives to the client: one garden gate appears in eight different versions in the records.<sup>16</sup> In her designs



Kidney-shaped garden seat, Dumbarton Oaks. Design drawing and photograph.

for the garden furniture, almost all pieces were detailed at full scale. Furniture and plant material were designed as a piece, as the drawing for the kidney seat in the Forsythia Walk and the photograph of its bower setting show.<sup>17</sup> Mock-ups were erected on the site for the client to see, and they were altered in place. As Mildred Bliss described it:

*...such were Mrs. Farrand's integrity and loyalty that, despite the long absences necessitated by the professional nomadism of the owners, never in all the years did she impose a detail of which she was "sure" but which the owners' eye did not "see"; and never were the owners so persuasive as to insist on a design which Mrs. Farrand's inner eye could not accept.*<sup>18</sup>

The correspondence gives evidence of the on-site testing process:

*It would seem to me perhaps best not to build the spur wall northwest of the garage higher than is necessary to retain the roadway until you and I have a chance to see it.*<sup>19</sup>

It also gives evidence of the construction and study of on-site mock-ups:

*...I agree with you that the width of the staircase should probably be reduced, as I thought the dummy rather over-large when we measured it together. As I am expecting to go to Washington during the week after Labor Day, I think of telling Davis to put up the dummy so I can see it then; and if you are in the Washington area at the moment I can report to you on its appearance.*<sup>20</sup>

Once things were tested, and seen, there were fast, clear-cut decisions:

*If you are willing I will take the responsibility of asking you to take off the two balconies over the east bay roof which will look even more dreadfully when the new lead roof is in place than they do now (which is saying a good deal!). If you agree to taking off the balconies will you write and tell Davis he may do so, and tell him to keep them carefully in case they are again needed. We can keep them intact so that if their absence is lamented we can glue them on again.*<sup>21</sup>

Little was said, however, in the letters of exactly what Farrand was striving for in her design, except for one theme which can be threaded through her few written statements:

*Perhaps also you will help me with the north vista, as I think you and I are anxious to keep this part of the design, and yet it must look as if it belonged there.*<sup>22</sup>

Farrand intended her gardens to be used, and she was constantly aware of how people would move through and enjoy the garden. Dumbarton Oaks was planted for fall, winter, and spring, but not for summer, when its owners would be away. The enjoyment and comfort of the user were considered as important as form and visual considerations:

*When it is realized that the level between the Orangery floor and the level around Lovers Lane Pool shows a drop between 45 and 50 feet, there will be a clearer understanding for the reasons controlling the design of the conspicuously narrow terraces and their accompanying flights of steps...the steps everywhere have been made not higher than a six-inch rise and with a 14-inch or wider tread as it was realized that weariness in step-climbing takes away much of the pleasure of a garden visit. It was also established as a general principle that where possible no flights of more than six steps should be built without a landing between the first and the next run of another six or eight steps. These landings have been made longer than three feet where possible in order to give rest to the climber.*<sup>23</sup>

Farrand's manuscript at the Dumbarton Oaks Garden Library consists mainly of notes for planting with lists of appropriate plant materials, but occasionally there is a statement of design intentions:

*This courtyard is hardly a garden but should be thought of more as an unroofed room adjoining the music room and the museum so that its scale is really an interior and not an outdoor scale and the planting should be done with this constantly in mind.*<sup>24</sup>

If one tried to find one overall concept that unified all of Farrand's work, I think

it would be the garden as a sequence of spaces rather than just a large vista.<sup>25</sup> This idea is central to the design of Dumbarton Oaks, as is the idea of the decreasing formality of spaces as they move away from the house. Both ideas owe much to the work of Edith Wharton. In preparation for her book on Italian villas, Wharton wrote:

*The really interesting thing is the relation of architecture to nature in old Italian gardens. . . . A secret of their art is the skillful subdivision of parts so that instead of a flat waste of lawn or an unbroken extent of formal garden they provide a variety of effects and impressions, alternations of shade and sunshine, of movement and repose, of definite architectural lines and vague masses of foliage.<sup>26</sup>*

And in the book *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, published in 1904, when Farrand was getting her first important commissions, Wharton commented:

*...to this end, the grounds were as carefully and conveniently planned as the house, with broad paths (in which two or more could go abreast) leading from one division to another; each step away from architecture was a nearer approach to nature.<sup>27</sup>*

If Wharton was present in the overall structure of the garden's design, Gertrude Jekyll appears in the aesthetics of individ-

ual parts. Jekyll, a member of the English Arts and Crafts movement, found inspiration in cottage gardens and in the vernacular, or what was of local and traditional use. She, too, made a garden by creating a series of distinct spaces. She gave these spaces different characters through the use of texture and color, often confined to a limited range in a contained space. Examples are her purple-grey garden at Hestercombe and the all-white garden at Sissinghurst (designed by Vita Sackville-West under the influence of Jekyll). It is this boldness in the use of a narrow color range which is echoed in Farrand's Dumbarton Oaks, both in the Forsythia Hill and in the Green Garden behind the Orangery, where planting consists of trees, grass, and ivy ground cover to serve as background to the colors of dresses at the outdoor entertainments held there in spring and summer. The clearly contained green of Jekyll's Castle Drogo circle reverberates in Farrand's Dumbarton Oaks ellipse, originally also made of box hedges, but replaced with a double row of hornbeams in aerial-hedge formation. Finally, as the garden reaches its edge and seeps, nearly, into nature, both Jekyll and Farrand stand as major artists. Jekyll's pond at Great Dixter and Farrand's Cherry Hill are made to look like nature itself. Only Jekyll and Farrand, her disciple, attempted to get so close. But Farrand stated explicitly that this was not done in search of the natural garden:

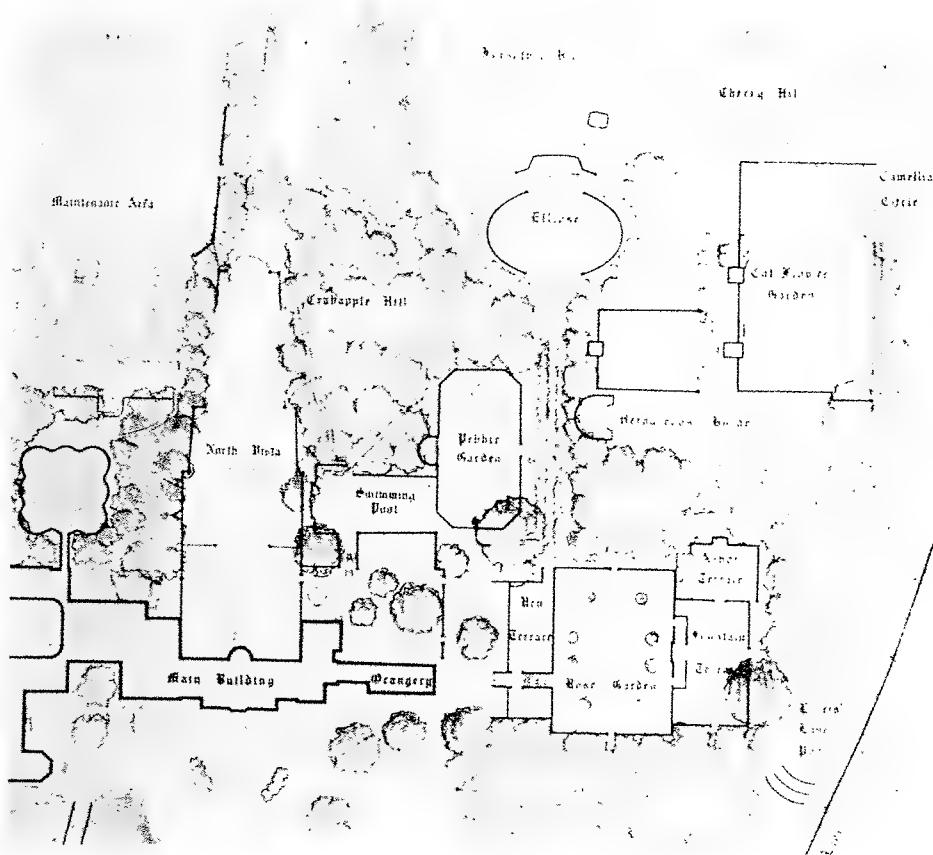
*...a garden is an absolutely artificial thing. It is the change of scale [from nature's scale] that makes the composition artificial: a real garden is just as artificial as a painting.<sup>28</sup>*

A tentative assessment of Farrand's work sets it apart from her contemporary practitioners, who were building gardens in "styles." She referred to precedents, but did not copy them. She opposed many of White's and her clients' desires to bring in fountains, gates, and other garden furniture from Europe. But she was not a purist, for she incorporated many such objects which were bought for the garden. Her greatest achievement was in making effective use of the existing site, whether a hill or a hollow or existing trees, to create a designed garden which looked as if it belonged there.

Records show that on the Bliss job Farrand was mainly assisted by two designers in her office: Anne Baker and Maya H. Bailie. There was also a draftsman who signed some drawings "G. Russ." In the ten years of the Bliss job (1923-33), there were at least ten other large design jobs in the office.<sup>29</sup> Farrand had two offices in those years: one in New York and another in Bar Harbor, Maine. There were copies of the most active jobs at both offices.

By following the addresses in the correspondence for those ten years, we can make out that Farrand spent the months from May to November working in her Maine office and the rest of the year in her New York office. But she did not work only in the office: most letters refer to a forthcoming visit or a return from a job site. Since all these travels were by train, her activity was quite remarkable.

A list of home addresses throws some light on the way Farrand coordinated her work with her personal life, which she always kept very private. New York City appears as a home address in 1913. At the end of 1913, at age 42, she married Yale historian Max Farrand. Her home address is then listed as New Haven, with her New York address as the office. In 1924 she added the Maine office. In 1926 she added a home in New York at 77 Park Avenue. By 1927, and until 1942, Max Farrand was Director of the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. Beatrix Farrand was offered a curatorship there, but she declined it. We then see her traveling for one month every year to California, from late December to late January. Max Farrand came east for the summer months and sometimes longer. By 1932, toward the end of the Dumbarton Oaks job, she still had her two offices, but she listed her home address as San Marino, California.<sup>30</sup> At the height of the Bliss job, for her yearly trip to California, she would send a set of addresses along the train stops so



Garden plan, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

she could be reached in transit on job matters.

Little evidence of her private life remains beyond this outline of enormous activity. The very small glimpses she lets us catch of her reflect the anxiety of such a busy life:

*Thank you, too, for offering to put me up in New Haven, but I fear I am so agitated a guest that I had better go to a hotel rather than bother people of whom I am fond with my strange hours and ceaseless work. I do, however, appreciate your inviting me, and some day when work calms down slightly will take advantage of your niceness.<sup>31</sup>*

Beatrix Farrand certainly achieved great success in her profession. She accomplished a large body of excellent work and was an innovator in her subtle translation of foreign forms at a time when foreign models flooded American design. She ran her jobs in the format of a modern American office at a time in which this specialized office format was just emerging. Her clients and collaborators were important socially and professionally. She had made herself officially prominent in the profession by helping to found the American Society of Landscape Architects. Why, then, has she been forgotten, unlike her two professional role models, Wharton and Jekyll?

A comparison to Jekyll, who is well remembered as a landscape architect, is instructive. Jekyll was prolific in writing about her work, writing book after book on gardening, as well as articles in journals important in the field. Farrand wrote only a few articles very early in her career. The notes which survive from Dumbarton Oaks gardens are just working notes, mostly about plant materials. Woman's work tends to remain within the private sphere unless it is forced out into the public domain, usually by the method of printing. I do not think it is accidental that literature is one of the few areas where there have been important women artists. The printed word insures that the work becomes public. Painting on a canvas or composing music does not. In landscape architecture and architecture, private gardens and private homes have been the main realm in which women have worked. It is Jekyll's writings about her gardens which have saved her work for posterity more than her actual gardens. Trapped in the private sphere, women and their work disappear and remain unacknowledged, ineffective. It is because Dumbarton Oaks has become a garden open to the public that we have a chance to recover Beatrix Farrand.

1. Oct. 28, 1931, Beatrix Farrand to Lawrence G. White (New York Historical Society [NYHS], McKim, Mead and White [MMW] Correspondence, Bliss File [BF] 396).
2. Also Vassar College, Yale, Princeton, and Chicago Universities.
3. I am greatly indebted to Darwina L. Neal, Vice-President of the American Society of Landscape Architects, and to Laura Byers, in charge of the Garden Library at Dumbarton Oaks.
4. Catherine Howland Hunt, *The R. M. Hunt Papers*, ed. Alan Burnham (Greenwich, Conn: American Architectural Archive), p. 261.
5. Daniel Burnham (1846-1912) was a Chicago architect and planner-organizer of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), a landscape architect, founded the profession in the United States and designed Central Park in New York City and the grounds for the Chicago World's Fair.
6. Hunt, p. 278.
7. In 1899 Beatrix Farrand, aged 27, and 10 other landscape architects, all men, founded the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA).
8. Edith Wharton's brother, Frederick Jones, divorced Mary Cadwalader Jones when Beatrix was still a child. Nevertheless, mother and daughter remained part of Wharton's entourage, first at Wharton's "The Mount" in Lenox, Mass., then in France and England. The wealthy set they belonged to is depicted in Wharton's *Age of Innocence*.
9. Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) was the most important English landscape architect of her time. Farrand bought all of Jekyll's papers and design drawings at an auction in England in the late '30s and later donated them to the Berkeley Library of Landscape Architecture.
10. Georgina Masson, *Dumbarton Oaks: A Guide to the Gardens* (Washington, D.C.: Port City Press, 1968), p. 6.
11. Edward F. Whitney (N.Y., 1906), Graduate College at Princeton (1912), Willard D. Straight (Old Westbury, N.Y., 1913), Robert Goelet (Chester, N.Y., 1913), White House garden for Mrs. Woodrow Wilson (1913), Mrs. Herbert L. Satterlee (Bar Harbor, Me., 1916), Edward S. Harkness (New London, Conn., 1920)—this brought the commission for eight new Yale colleges for which Harkness gave the money (1921), Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt (no date but built in the teens).
12. Philip Johnson credited Mildred Bliss as co-designer of the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Colombian Art Museum.
13. July 20, 1926, Farrand to White (NYHS, MMW Correspondence, BF, 396).
14. Oct. 8, 1926, Farrand to White (NYHS, MMW Correspondence, BF 396).
15. Oct. 29, 1926, Farrand to White (NYHS, MMW Correspondence, BF 396).
16. Folder C 2.09 8 variants of garden gate (date 5/10/39, Garden Library, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees of Harvard University, Washington, D.C.).
17. Folder B 2. 13 kidney seat drawings at 3" = 1'; 1 1/2" = 1' and full-scale detail. *Ibid.*
18. Mildred Bliss, "Beatrix Farrand: An Attempted Evocation of a Personality," *Landscape Architecture*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Summer 1959), p. 223.
19. Jan. 18, 1926, Farrand to White (NYHS, MMW Correspondence, BF 396).
20. Aug. 29, 1927, Farrand to White (NYHS, MMW Correspondence, BF 396).
21. April 23, 1928, Farrand to White (NYHS, MMW Correspondence, BF 396).
22. June 15, 1923, Farrand to White (NYHS, MMW Correspondence, BF 396).
23. Beatrix Farrand's Notes on the Gardens of Dumbarton Oaks, section titled "Orangery" (Garden Library, Dumbarton Oaks).
24. Beatrix Farrand's Notes on the Gardens of Dumbarton Oaks, section titled "Museum Courtyard."
25. Beatrix Farrand called herself a "landscape gardener." This was an ideological stand against the English school of landscape architecture created by Capability Brown which sought to create large landscaped vistas.
26. April 7, 1902, Edith Wharton to Maxfield Parrish, from Milan (letter from Wharton estate, copy kindly lent by Coy Ludwig, Director Tyler Art Gallery, SUNY Oswego).
27. Edith Wharton, *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (New York: Century, 1904 [Da Capo reprint 1976]), pp. 11-12.
28. Beatrix Jones, "The Garden as Picture," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 42 (July 1907), p. 7.
29. Headmaster's garden, Hill School (Pottstown, Pa., 1922); consulting landscape gardener, Yale University (from 1922; design for grounds of new colleges from 1927); consulting landscape gardener, Hill School (from 1925); consulting landscape gardener, Vassar (from 1925); Percy R. Pyne II garden (Roslyn, N.Y., 1926); Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (Seal Harbor, Me., 1927); Dabney Hall Garden, California Institute of Technology (Pasadena, Cal., 1929); various buildings, University of Chicago (1930-31); consulting landscape gardener, University of Chicago (1933); Dartington Hall and Estate (Devonshire, Eng., 1933).
30. By 1940 when she was 68, the N.Y. office was disassembled. The Bar Harbor address became both office and home two years later. Max Farrand died there in 1945; she died there in 1959 at 87.
31. Oct. 9, 1937, Farrand to Mrs. Charles Andrews (Yale University Library, Charles Andrews Collection Box 64, Folder Oct. 1-9).

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# Building the Women's Club in Nineteenth-Century America

Cynthia Rock

Women conversing in social visits in each other's homes or gathering near husbands at a dinner party remain women as wives, mothers, daughters, mistresses of the house; women deliberately gathering away from home to discuss their common womanhood and to help each other grow is an act heavy with the potential for social change. We are familiar with this phenomenon through the consciousness-raising groups of the early 1970s. What is not so well known is that such gatherings were preceded 100 years earlier in the formation of the first women's clubs in America. In both eras women were motivated to come together by their discontent with isolation in the home. In the post-Civil War era, however, the stricter definition of proper behavior made the formation of a club exclusively for women a much more difficult act—one that some saw as scandalous and one that provoked the disapproval of many a Victorian husband. Nevertheless, women's clubs proliferated and lasted. To make manifest their identity and their commitment to continuity, many clubs put their resources to the task of planning, financing, and building clubhouses for themselves. The energy of the club movement and the need which it met resulted in a membership of 200,000 women by 1902.<sup>1</sup> Having bettered the lives of women members as well as implementing social reforms, the movement became the breeding ground for the political activity which achieved women's suffrage in 1920.

Nineteenth-century women had first met in work groups such as church sewing circles. These meetings were for specific charitable purposes, and they did not require women to voice opinions, make policy, or do original work. One can speculate that the conversation remained very close to the domestic realm. Meanwhile, participation in the abolition movement was bringing some women to the public podium and requiring them to develop organizational skills. As a result, some women developed a taste for intellectually demanding activity outside the

home, while younger women, newly educated alongside men, felt stultified in the confines of domestic life after the mental work and companionship of school.

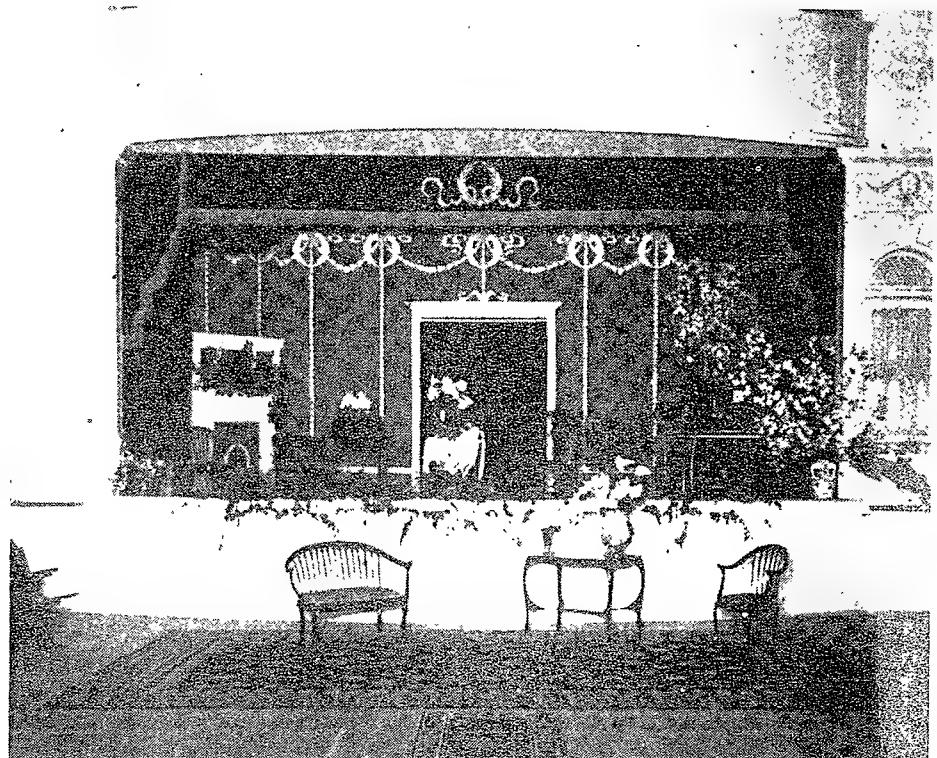
As early as the 1820s women in Smithfield, R.I., began meeting as the Female Improvement Society with the intention of developing their minds through reading and writing.<sup>2</sup> Jennie C. Croly, a New York journalist and historian of the women's club movement, dates the beginning of the movement with her own March 1868 call for a meeting to form what became the club "Sorosis," an event which was provoked by her rebuffed attempt to attend a dinner for Charles Dickens at the Press Club of New York.<sup>3</sup>

The women who gathered to form Sorosis came together with the idea that the club would not have a central belief or a specific charitable purpose. The idea uniting this and other early clubs was that

of coming together from diverse parts of society in equality and common womanhood to seek greater knowledge together. "Unity in Diversity" later became the slogan of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs.

*It [Sorosis] simply felt the stirring of an intense desire that women should come together—all together, not from one church or one neighborhood, or one walk of life, but from all quarters, and take counsel together, find the cause of failure and separation, of ignorance and wrongdoing...saying and doing what we are able to say and do, without asking leave, and without suffering hindrance.<sup>4</sup>*

More specific goals would emerge, they believed, when women were encouraged to think independently. Croly, in her 1300-page *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* of 1898,



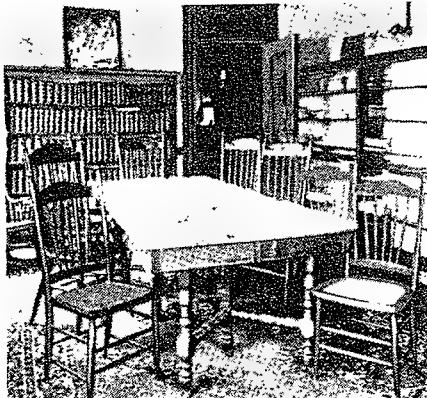
Drawing room stage, New Century Club, Wilmington, Delaware, 1893. Minerva Parker (later Nichols), Architect.

traces the clubwomen's motivation to the reformist ideas of the 19th century and its belief in "the rights of all living things" stemming from the Reformation and the Renaissance. In an analysis sounding like feminist writing from the 1970s, she contrasts contemporary woman's isolation in the home with the communality of matriarchal American Indian societies, and she singles out women's religious orders as the only previous refuge from male power. The lack of charitable goals or a very specific purpose made Sorosis an object of ridicule and criticism by men, and some husbands forbade wives to join. Perhaps early clubwomen wished to avoid the indelicacy and potential conflicts of political work. In any case, they were clever in choosing to build slowly on what they had in common—their own ignorance and sense of exclusion from the world's important business.

Principles of equal status, equal sharing of work and opportunity, and a natural following of the group's changing and expanding interests are ideals which are mentioned again and again in the reports from hundreds of women's clubs in the United States and abroad, which Croly compiled in her history. The activity that seems to have sparked the most interest in earliest clubs was self-education, and reading and analysis of literature above all. Shakespeare, Greek poetry, Thackeray, and Emerson were popular subjects for study. In addition, the clubs studied art—"How to See Pictures," "The Art of the Sculptor"—ancient and European history, languages, and geography. Some larger clubs developed a curriculum of standing study courses on many topics. Others stayed on a topic for months at a time in order to avoid superficiality; one procedure was to take a mock tour of a country, studying all its aspects over a period of months. Preparation of analytical papers and presentation to the group was a standard format. Many clubs insisted that each member make these presentations in turn—an idea which reverberates in the 1970s with consciousness-raising groups "going around the circle" to speak. Club reports are full of testimonials of very timid, little-educated women blossoming as they discovered their intelligence and developed their skills in writing and speaking. One Sorosis member wrote:

*One of the greatest needs of women is motive for mental activity—an hospitable entertainment of their thought. [Sorosis gave me] an atmosphere so genial, an appreciation so prompt, a faith so generous, that every possibility of my nature seemed intensified, and all its latent powers quickened into life.<sup>5</sup>*

The desire to have a permanent, official place which was the club can be seen



Corner in reading room, Nineteenth Century Club of Memphis, Tennessee.

throughout the reports from women's clubs. The claiming of space or the making of a place out of physical materials and dedicating it to a group and its ideals and activities is an essential human activity and may be seen as the primary act of architecture. The act of making a building for oneself or one's group is a concretization and permanent record of self-image, aspirations, and perceived needs. An examination of women's club buildings and the process of making them through what data remain—mainly verbal descriptions, but also some drawings and photographs—reveals these characteristics.

In some instances women architects and artists were commissioned to work on clubhouses. The two New Century Clubs, in Philadelphia and in Wilmington, were designed by Miss Minerva Parker, later Mrs. Nichols, one of the earliest women architects on record. In the Philadelphia reception room a Miss Gabrielle Clements executed the allegorical murals showing youths and maidens symbolizing Art, Science, Labor, and Charity. Julia Morgan, the prolific California architect, was commissioned to build a number of women's club buildings in that state, including the 1915 Foothills Club in Saratoga, the 1918 club in Sausalito, and the Berkeley Women's City Club of 1928.<sup>6</sup> The enthusiasm which must have gone into such all-woman endeavors is thrilling to imagine, and it is evident in the descriptions in Croly's book, such as that of the opening of the Wilmington New Century Club:

*On January 31, 1893, a few days past the fourth anniversary, the beautiful "club house" was completed. As the love of home is deeply rooted in the heart of every woman, surely when 400 women's hearts were "beating as one" in the anticipation of club-house-keeping, it may justly be claimed as a day in the annals of history.<sup>7</sup>*

Spatial descriptions of clubhouses emphasize the main assembly room, since lectures, presentation of work, meetings,

and musical entertainments were always at the core of club activities. In the Philadelphia club, as in others, this large assembly room included the amenity of a stage. The large space, which seated 500, was softened by subsidiary smaller areas—a bay-window alcove, a viewers' gallery, and a musicians' gallery "with Moorish fretwork" over the stage—so that intimate groupings could coexist with the mass assembly of the main space.

The description of the auditorium of the Chicago Woman's Club mentions the speaker's platform surrounded by chairs placed in a semicircle—a traditional image of equality and a form linked with womanhood. Also described is the presence of palms and fresh flowers around the "very beautiful" chairs of the president and secretary on the platform. A similar appreciation for the sensuous beauty of the clubhouse is evident in many club reports.

Also important in club spatial programs were libraries. In fact, some of the early clubs' spaces consisted solely of a library and reading room. Collecting books and periodicals for the clubwomen's use was often the first activity of a club, and making a library for the community was sometimes an important project. In several instances women's clubs constructed public library buildings and then used a space within for club headquarters. In 1878 the Ladies Library Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, built the first library building owned and controlled by women in the United States on a lot donated by a woman. The club had its home within. Likewise, the Helena, Arkansas, Woman's Library Association erected a "commodious brick building" as a library to be operated entirely by women.

Some women's clubhouses included certain functional spaces which were invented as a response to newly recognized women's needs. In several clubhouses there was a dressing room with dressing "partitions" for each member. The rigid dress protocol of the time required change of costume between, for example, daytime and evening, and this amenity allowed members to change costume without returning home. One club report mentions folding cots in the dressing room, so a woman could even nap. The Philadelphia New Century Clubhouse was designed as a place where women from outside the city could spend the night "in a quiet and safe place" after an evening in the city for a lecture or a concert.

The Chicago Woman's Club reported it had quiet sitting rooms, always available, where women could withdraw for small conferences on lounges and easy chairs. This club also had dressing rooms and offered "simple lunches" so that a

busy member could stay in town for a long day in propriety and comfort.

The clubhouse of the Central Club of Norwalk, Connecticut, included spaces which were permanent classrooms. This club functioned as an "academy of arts and sciences" in the small town, with standing courses in parliamentary law, physical culture, millinery, French, German, whist, voice culture, social sciences, current events, and first aid.

Practical and progressive topics of homemaking such as "The Chemistry of Food and Body-Building" or "Homes as They Are and Homes as They Should Be" appear early in the records of club work, as well as specifically women-oriented issues, such as "The Conditions of Shop-Girls," "Women as Sincere Friends," "Physical Culture for Women," "The Women of India," and "Laws of State Affecting Women as Wives, Mothers, and Owners of Property." The early existence of general reform topics such as "Living Conditions in the Poorer Parts of the City" indicates the tension from the beginning between the idea of clubs for women's individual improvement and the desire to act in the public sphere. Club reports link these reformist desires to woman's morally excellent character, her inherent sense of duty, and the need for an outlet for the enormous energy generated by women working together. The argument for restraint from participation in public life seems to have abated quite early, since women's clubs participated almost from the start in lobbying for matrons in women's jails and female doctors in mental hospitals, for example, and for reforms in public education such as the inclusion of kindergartens and job-training curricula. Certain clubs focused on the problems of working-class women. An example is the Buffalo, New York, Woman's Educational and Industrial Union, founded in 1887, which offered domestic training courses, employment services, education in legal rights and debt collection, and physical education, along with lectures and entertainments for working-class women. In Philadelphia the New Century Club's efforts to help working-class women led to the formation of the independent New Century Guild of Working Women. The Guild had its own house, where it offered members trade classes and "circles" for the practice of job skills such as stenography. In addition, there were classes to discuss readings and history, and a 2000-volume library. The Guild published a newspaper, *The Working Woman's Journal*, from its own printshop. Women could bring lunch to the Guild's dining room and purchase tea, coffee, or soup, and they could rest in quiet rooms before returning to their jobs. By 1894 the Guild had 1434 members.

At the same time, Black women formed their own clubs, which focused on educational and welfare issues in their communities.<sup>8</sup> In the 1890s these clubs began to form federations, and in 1896 the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) united three large federations and over a hundred local clubs. Often formed of middle-class women, the clubs were crucial in organizing and funding schools, orphanages, day-care centers, and old-age homes in communities where there were no other social welfare programs for Blacks. In addition, self-improvement activities such as lectures and literary study groups were carried on, just as in contemporary white women's clubs. In the 1890s Black women's clubs began to focus on the issue of defense of Black women against sexual abuse by white men, in conjunction with the anti-lynching crusade. Later in that decade urban clubs of the NACW did social work for Black women arriving from the South seeking work; they offered recreation, literary and cultural events, and courses in Black history. In Cleveland a club pro-

their strength and ability to shape forces in the community. However, the architectural forms of the buildings do not reflect this power-seeking—they remain delicate and rather domestic, for the most part. The clubwomen's desire for refinement and lightness in their buildings is apparent both from photographs of the spaces and from the language of their descriptions: "delicate," "pale," "fine" recur in the club-by-club reports. The use of domestic imagery may be seen as an attempt to blend in with surrounding houses—a kind of camouflage to avoid threatening the status quo with an all-woman institution that was visibly different, as well. Or perhaps woman's internalization of the home as her place accounts for the house image. Lightness and delicacy of architectural form were associated in the late 19th century with a reaction to Victorian style and Victorian values (including unchallenged patriarchy). In England, where the Queen Anne style emerged in this period, and also in the United States, the return from the Gothic and Classical to the delicacy of 18th-century forms was a stylistic change made popular by people who thought of themselves as progressives and aesthetes. That is, they believed in the value of creating and enjoying art in all forms, and in "truth-seeking" or intellectual pursuits for their own sake. They advocated the dissemination of art and knowledge through all social classes along with more mundane reforms, as in education and hygiene.<sup>9</sup> As we have seen, the rhetoric and programs of the women's club movement of this era are very close to these ideals, so there may be a cultural link manifesting itself in architectural style.

In contrast to the vocabulary of delicacy of the women's club buildings stands the style of massiveness and domination in men's club buildings, such as the palazzo image of the University Club in New York. Ironically, men's clubs, with their power image, served as something of a retreat for men from power-dealing, while domestic and sweet-looking women's clubs represented a step out of the home and toward the power inherent in numbers of women working together.

How, then, were women's clubs able to finance these rather large-scale building projects? Although reports occasionally mention the generous gift of a friend of the club, both female and male, it was mainly the idea of strength in numbers that made projects possible. The most common method seems to have been for the club to start a stock corporation with shares for sale for as little as five dollars or as much as fifty dollars. Buying a share of stock was often the entrance fee to club membership, and stock seems to have always been held exclusively by club members. For the rather comfortable



New Century Club, Wilmington, Delaware.

vided shelters for women who were denied admission to the YWCA. In Washington, D.C., a club provided job-training for kindergarten teachers. The Atlanta Neighborhood Union was founded by women in 1908 to find a way of providing play space for Black children; it expanded to undertake a range of social service projects and to exert political pressure to improve conditions in Black public schools. The Union established medical clinics and launched campaigns for home improvement and neighborhood clean-up. The approach included both self-help and political pressure. The Neighborhood Union bought its own house in 1922; it became the focal point of the local Black community since it housed a health clinic, social service staff, mothers' club, Boy and Girl Scout troops, homemaking and woodworking classes.

Croly's clubwomen reported that one motivation for building clubhouses was "to have a greater influence." They saw the building itself as a manifestation of

middle-class women who, for the most part, constituted women's club memberships, the cost of a share of stock must have been quite affordable.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond raising capital, women's clubs were often quite ingenious in their schemes for generating ongoing income to pay mortgages and operating expenses of clubhouses. The New Century Club of Wilmington was designed with a pharmacy and a cafe at street level, so that continuous rental income was expected. The Central Club of Norwalk, Connecticut, rented space to the town's Women's Exchange twice a week. The Athenaeum in Milwaukee and the New Century Club in Philadelphia, among others, were designed so that the main reception room could be opened and reached without passing through any quiet clubrooms; thus the room could be rented out for private receptions, balls, theatricals, and entertainments. In the Philadelphia club, a wide oak staircase led directly from the entrance foyer to the second-floor reception room—a large space that had been planned in response to a need the women saw in the city. It was extremely successful, and the demand for its use far exceeded its availability. The practical-minded clubwomen had two rules for its use: the club always had first claim on any space at any time, and no alcohol could be served—they were quick to add that the clubwomen themselves were not teetotalers, but that they were taking every precaution to limit wear and tear on their clubrooms.

Another professed motivation for building a clubhouse was the desire to entertain other women's clubs. The enthusiasm for increasingly larger gatherings of groups, as well as for the formation of as many clubs as possible, is evident in the clubs' reports. This desire to proliferate seems to have obfuscated any competitive feelings. In fact, the New Century Club of Wilmington, after successfully financing and constructing a clubhouse with great care, published a pamphlet of drawings and information for the use of other clubs wanting to build. In Norwalk, Connecticut, five women's clubs in town pooled their resources to build a house. Each club held its meetings there and entertained the other clubs on a monthly basis.

In the early 1870s the club movement spread, largely through the influence of an organization called the Association for the Advancement of Women, which called its first conference in New York's Union Square Theater in 1873. The keynote speaker was Julia Ward Howe, whose paper was "How Can Women Best Associate Their Efforts for the Amelioration of Society?" Four hundred women representing 18 states attended the conference, and annual conferences were held subsequent-

ly in various cities, spawning more and more women's clubs with every meeting. The need to communicate and organize among clubs was strong, and federation began in 1889 with the foundation of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, which was restructured in 1894 through the formation of federations of clubs in each state. National conventions occurred biannually, always in a different city.

Continuity resulting from the tangible identity of a club building as well as from commitments to stock companies, corporate charters, and tenants, and this allowed women's clubs to develop, following and forming the issues which were important to women. As more and more women joined clubs, as changes in domestic work made it possible for women to spend more time away from home, and perhaps as male society became more adjusted to the idea of women's clubs, work became more focused on social reform and politics and less on literature, art, and geography. It is no wonder that out of this rich concentration of women's energies grew a deeper concern with feminist issues. At the 1904 biannual convention of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, a discussion of suffrage took place for the first time, and a woman voter from Colorado was elected president. Her keynote address announced, "Ladies...Dante is dead...and I think it is time that we dropped the study of his *Inferno* and turned our attention to our own."<sup>11</sup> The reaction of the male establishment was indicative of the potential power of the women's club movement. Writing in the May 1905 *Ladies' Home Journal*, ex-President Grover Cleveland said, "I am persuaded that without exaggeration of statement we may assume that there are woman's clubs whose objects and intents are not only harmful, but harmful in a way that directly menaces the integrity of our homes and the benign disposition and character of our wifehood and motherhood....I believe that it should be boldly declared that the best and safest club for a woman to patronize is her home."<sup>12</sup>

In the post-suffrage era the women's club, like the whole feminist movement, retreated in exhaustion from the fight for women's progress and took on once again its social role and its place in community reform. The radical aspect of early club ideals reappeared in the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s, when once again women founded new institutions for themselves. Women's Studies departments in universities, as well as specialized alternative women's schools such as the Woman's School of Planning and Architecture, echo the classes set up by early women's clubs. The Los Angeles-based Woman's Building with its standing curriculum of courses for women and its commitment to a structure

as a symbol and an assurance of continuity exists in much the same spirit as the early clubs. Its financial struggle for survival and the dearth of similar women's buildings attest to late 20th-century realities of real estate and construction costs, as well as the effects of a redistribution of wealth and a more egalitarian membership. Today it is perhaps the communications network, rather than the clubhouse of a century ago, which women must use to create ongoing connections for mutual support, self-education, and political power.

1. Sherna Gluck, Ed., *From Parlor to Prison: Five American Suffragists Talk about Their Lives* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p. 12.
2. Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 41.
3. Jennie Cunningham Croly (Jennie June), *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* (New York: Allen, 1898). Published under the authority of the Council of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs of America. All information in this paper not otherwise attributed is drawn from this source.
4. Croly, p. 18.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
6. Sarah Holmes Boutelle, "Julia Morgan and Her Clients," *This Issue*, p. 91.
7. Croly, p. 333.
8. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 83-93. All information on Black women's clubs is taken from this source.
9. Mark Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: The "Queen Anne" Movement, 1860-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
10. For example, when the Woman's Club of Wisconsin in Milwaukee decided to build its own house, to be called the Athenaeum, the members formed a corporation, stating "the capital stock of said corporation shall be \$25,000, divided into one thousand shares of twenty-five dollars each" (Croly, p. 1159).
11. Gluck, p. 13.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Cynthia Rock is an architect practicing in New York.

# Women's Networks: Julia Morgan and Her Clients

Sara Holmes Boutelle

Clients are the catalysts of architecture; they enable the architect's thoughts on paper to exist in three dimensions, and they may often play a creative role in the design process. Yet the crucial relationship between designer and client and the manner in which an architect receives a commission have largely been kept in the wings of architectural history. In the case of women architects and designers this relationship is of particular complexity. For women, entrée into traditional centers of power and influence, in an economic and political sense—the milieus that afford the contacts which develop clients—is largely closed.

An examination of the clients of Julia Morgan, the most prolific independent woman architect in American architectural history, provides an understanding of how a woman functioned as a professional within the restrictions inherent in being a woman before World War II. Approximately half of Morgan's clients were women or institutions for women. She determinedly avoided publicity and self-promotion. Most of her important clients developed not as a result of accounts of her work in popular and professional journals but from social connections and recommendations from former clients and a network of both women of wealth and women professionals of more modest economic means.

In 1902, after completing a first degree at Berkeley in engineering, Julia Morgan completed a course in the section of architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She was the first woman in the school's history to be accepted for this course. For 40 years she headed her own architectural firm in San Francisco, and when she died at age 85 in 1957 she had designed some 700 buildings. She designed within an eclectic vocabulary, drawing on both the academic Beaux-Arts and traditional California vernacular architecture for inspiration. She practiced in this mode with close attention to the desires of her clients and to sound construction. Many of her commissions were the result of earlier ones for the same clients.

From the beginning of her career, Julia Morgan was encouraged by women. Morgan's very first client, while she was still in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, was Mrs. Harriet Fearing, an expatriate from



Julia Morgan.

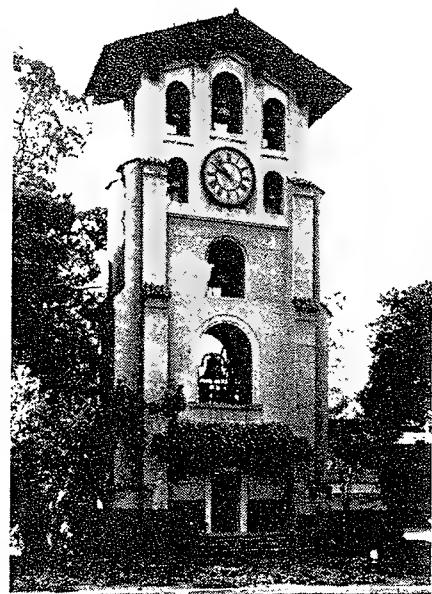
New York and Newport. Fearing asked Morgan to add a grand salon to her 17th-century house in Fontainebleau, where she could present musicales and exhibitions by her young protégées in the arts. The room was built in 1902 and was used as it had been intended until at least the middle of World War I, when Mrs. Fearing had to return temporarily to Newport. The specifications, including bills from masons, chimney-builders, locksmiths, and ornamental plasterers—all addressed to "Mlle. Morgan, Architecte"—were saved with her Beaux-Arts drawings and are in the Documents Collection at Berkeley.

Shortly after her return to California Morgan managed to set up her own office in San Francisco. Her first major building project was the Mills College Campanil of 1903-1904, the first college bell tower in the West. Susan Mills, the president (and co-founder) of this college for women, found a benefactor for the project in Frank Smith, the husband of one of her trustees. Undoubtedly Mrs. Mills liked the idea of an Oakland woman being the architect in charge of the project, but Mr. Smith listened to the complaints of the contractor, Bernard Ransome, who did not believe any young lady could understand rein-

forced concrete. Yet the tower withstood the earthquake of 1906. After quite a controversy, which almost makes it seem that Smith rather than Mills was the client, the completed tower was dedicated, with Ransome's name ahead of Morgan's in the program. (The plaque on the tower said: "Erected by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Smith.") The Mills commission brought others. Susan Mills commissioned Morgan to do the library, the gymnasium, the social hall, and the infirmary at the college, while Mr. Smith hired her to build a large "cottage" as a refuge for young women in whom his wife took a charitable interest.

Among Morgan's significant clients, Phoebe Apperson Hearst was one of the earliest. The connection with Mrs. Hearst was vital to Morgan's career. It was through Mrs. Hearst that Morgan became the "house" architect for western YWCAs. Phoebe Hearst's example led to the commission for San Simeon, the William Randolph Hearst estate, which in turn led to an association with Marion Davies, the presiding hostess at San Simeon, who later commissioned important works from Morgan.

"El Campanil," Mills College, Oakland, 1904.



Morgan's involvement with Mrs. Hearst began in her student days at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Mrs. Hearst provided stipends for all California students at the Ecole. In Paris Morgan had an apartment in the same house as Bernard Maybeck, who designed Hearst Hall for the University of California. This was first used as a reception pavilion for Mrs. Hearst's Berkeley house and later moved to the university. Morgan worked on some of the drawings for Hearst Hall. In 1910 Mrs. Hearst, or "the Empress" as she was called in certain circles in San Francisco, commissioned Morgan to enlarge and embellish her home "The Hacienda" in Pleasanton. The house became a social center for entertaining not just the family and personal friends, but beneficiaries of the various good works promoted by Mrs. Hearst. This included especially the women students of Berkeley and workers in the YWCA movement all over the West. The Hearst connection is obviously the key to understanding how Julia Morgan obtained her most important institutional client, the YWCA.

The Pacific Coast Field Committee of the National Y had conferred annually since 1900 at the old Hotel Capitola near the beach at Santa Cruz. When the hotel was destroyed by fire in 1912, Phoebe Hearst invited the conference to "The Hacienda," where she had a tent city

erected on the grounds, with facilities for 300 (including 300 pairs of rubbers and 300 umbrellas when a rainstorm came up). The camp equipment became the basic furniture for the conference grounds, established the next year in Pacific Grove. Here a tract of 30 acres along the ocean was given to the YWCA by the Pacific Improvement Company, with the stipulation that improvements worth \$30,000 be made within 10 years. This became Asilomar (refuge by the sea). Mrs. Hearst provided funds for the first Assembly Hall, now the Hearst Administration Building. The architect to plan and supervise the whole enterprise (built throughout the '20s) was Julia Morgan.

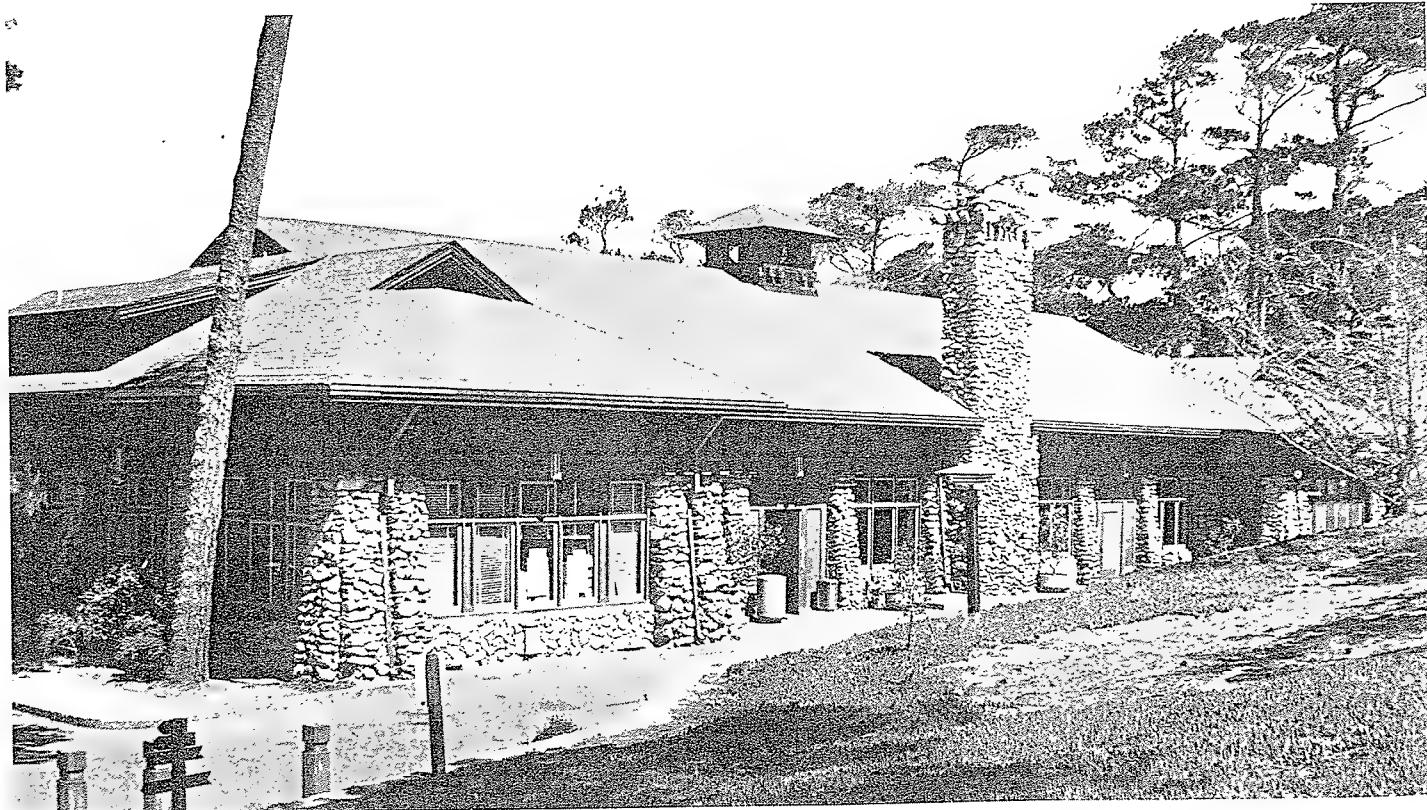
Between 1913 and 1915, she was also engaged in constructing large urban YWCAs in Oakland and San Jose, only the first of many Ys Morgan would design. Commissions for those two structures may have come at least in part from the influence of Morgan's sorority sister Grace Fisher, who was a YWCA board member. Julia Morgan wrote to Phoebe Hearst in 1919, saying how much she appreciated what had grown out of the "General Plan" of Asilomar—the relationship with the New York National YWCA Board, and in fact the offer to work there permanently to oversee building plans nationally (which she did not undertake). Morgan continues: "And so through it all

is the thread of your kindness since those Paris days when you were so beautifully kind to a most painfully shy and homesick girl."

The YWCA work naturally brought other institutional and private commissions from those associated with the Y. Hettie Belle Marcus, who was a board member of the YWCA when Morgan was building the high-rise YWCA residence in San Francisco in 1932, retained her to build a penthouse atop her own residence on Lombard Street in 1935. Elsa Schilling, also a member of the residence board, had Morgan build a Lake Tahoe house for her in 1939, which remains even today, a showplace. Miss Schilling was one of the founders of a scholarship in the architecture school in Morgan's name when she died.

Morgan's work at Mills College also brought her new and important commissions. Dr. Mariana Bertola had been the college physician at Mills when Morgan was engaged in building there. Immediately after the earthquake, when Dr. Bertola's house and office were destroyed by fire, she commissioned a new set of two buildings, one for offices and one for her residence on Jackson Street in San Francisco. These still stand, converted to apartments. Dr. Bertola's role as a client became more significant as she herself took on expanding leadership in the city.

Phoebe Hearst Administration Building, Asilomar, Pacific Grove, Cal., 1913. Photo credit: James H. Edelen.





Susan Mills, Julia Morgan's first client.

As President of the Federation of Woman's Clubs when they were engaged in their "Save-the-Redwoods" campaign, she saw to it that Morgan built the memorial to the efforts of the clubs at Humboldt Park. Then, as the chief mover in the Native Daughters of the Golden West, she arranged for Morgan to be the architect for the new state headquarters and residence on Baker Street in San Francisco.

The late 19th and early 20th century witnessed the growth of important women's institutions such as clubs and colleges. Morgan was often chosen as the designer for California women's clubs. Morgan designed a number of women's clubs, although the state federation does not seem to have served as a client, since each local group was well under way and usually in a clubhouse before affiliation with the federation took place. At any rate, the Foothill Club in Saratoga, organized in 1907, chose a building committee which asked Morgan for plans in 1914. The local newspaper reported that the architect submitted four possible designs, and in 1915 brought in the completed building unanimously chosen by their committee, for the sum of \$4500. This clubhouse was insured for \$150,000 in the '70s. The chairman of the building committee of the Minerva Club in Santa Maria had lived in Berkeley, where she had admired Morgan's residences and churches; Morgan was chosen as the architect for the new building. In Sausalito in 1918 the Women's Club met with some skepticism from fathers and brothers who heard of their choice of a woman architect. One concerned husband left a trust fund for repairs for this club, which he believed would inevitably fall apart. They were never able to touch that fund, so solid was the building, until a friendly lawyer made a case for refurbishing it for the nation's Bicentennial to qualify for the repair fund!

Morgan's own membership in the Century Club of San Francisco afforded her still another client. The club owned a building, but with growing membership, their headquarters seemed inadequate. They called on their own member, Julia Morgan, to enlarge and remodel it, and her work stands as a source of pride to the group. The Monday Club in San Luis Obispo and the Friday Morning Club in Los Angeles testify to many a busy week for this architect.

As for Berkeley, here would naturally assemble a sizable force of vigorous, educated women who wanted a club building which would rival anything in the city or in the state. This they secured in the Berkeley Women's City Club (now co-educational), a castlelike six-story structure designed around two courts, with a large daylighted swimming pool and flexible arrangements of dining rooms, drawing rooms, ballroom-auditorium, several kitchens, even a flower-arranging room. Magnificent ceilings, fireplaces, the grand staircase, all bespeak an elegance and sophistication for urban users. Every detail, including the lighting fixtures, the dishes, the linen, was of Morgan's design, and she also chose the furnishings.

Institutions for the education of women increased rapidly during the first part of the 20th century. The original "Theta" building (1908), the "Zeta" sorority (1910), and the Women's Social Hall, Girton (1911), all at the University of California, were commissions that surely came because Morgan was an alumna. Private secondary schools she designed include the Barnard School in Berkeley, Ransom and Bridges in Piedmont, the Burke and Hamlin Schools in San Francisco. All were founded by women, to provide an education of the highest quality for girls.

Many of her domestic commissions also came from women. Mrs. Elsie Drexler, who was listed as "Capitalist" in the San Francisco Directory, commissioned a redwood residence with pergolas, in Woodside; it is still one of the great houses of the Peninsula area. Mrs. Livermore of Livermore had Morgan build her a small house in the country and another on Russian Hill in San Francisco, behind the Willis Polk house at the crest. In 1916, when materials were scarce, the architect used windows salvaged from the Panama-Pacific Exposition, and the house for Mrs. Livermore, on three levels with a footbridge to the path uphill, is almost austere, although the extravagant views of city and bay make a strong appeal to the senses. Mrs. Starr, whose family had two Morgan houses in Piedmont, commissioned one in the hills above Fremont. Mrs. Brayton of Oakland had Morgan design a house suitable for entertaining on a large scale (her son recalls lavish masked balls with butlers pouring champagne for



Interior courtyard, Berkeley City Women's Club, 1929-30.

the dancers while the children watched from a balcony). She then commissioned another house in Piedmont with a theatre upstairs, and a "cottage" at Pebble Beach, designed around a Della Robbia plaque brought back from a European trip. Clara Huntington Perkins assisted Morgan with the designs for the tiles for her hilltop aerie in Los Gatos. Mrs. David Gamble was the head of the building committee for the Pasadena YWCA. Mrs. Cecil B. deMille was head of the building committee for the Hollywood Studio Club, a temporary residence and club for young women aspiring to become part of the movie industry.

At the same time Julia Morgan was designing simple, compact houses of redwood for teachers and doctors who did not have a lot of money. Drs. Elsa Mitchell and Clara Williams had a small redwood house built on a steep hillside falling away to the bay in Berkeley. The office and garage were in front at the upper level, while the living space was oriented to the rear, where the view of the bay is still awe-inspiring. Dr. Ruth Huffman of Petaluma had an earlier house remodeled to serve as both residence and lying-in hospital. Dr. Emma Wightman Pope, a college friend of Morgan's, had her build a retirement cottage on the hill overlooking the Mission at Carmel. Jessica Peixotto, a classmate at the University of California in 1894 and the first woman to gain a Ph.D. from Berkeley as well as the first woman professor there, commissioned a modest house near the campus. Miss Mollie Conners, an Oakland journalist, also turned to Morgan for a simple house in Piedmont, as did Annie Caroline Edmonds, a high school teacher of mathematics (one of five women in Berkeley's class of 1882). She wanted a larger income-producing house in Berkeley. The latter redwood structure, finished in 1904,

shows a sophisticated handling of space and details of craftsmanship which would continue to characterize the work of this architect.

No account of Morgan clients would be complete without mention of some of the families who called on her more than once for domestic and commercial buildings. Mrs. Glide of Sacramento commissioned her friend to build the Public Market, presently offices for the Secretary of State, and a fine house on the outskirts of her city. Then, as each Glide daughter married and settled in Berkeley, each had a Morgan house in a different style, one Tudor, one Georgian, and the third a handsome California original which now belongs to the university. Julia Morgan also built huge hay barns at Clarksburg, near Sacramento, for the Glide family. Mrs. Glide once asked Morgan to design a Methodist Church for a Glide memorial in San Francisco, but when she saw the

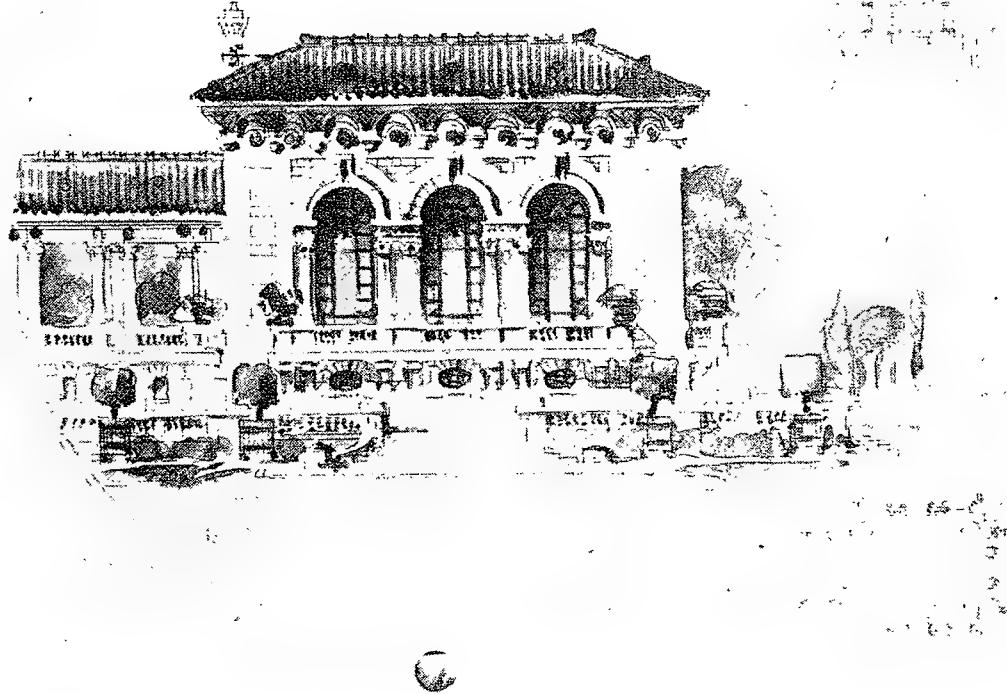
plans, she said it would be too expensive (a notoriously frugal lady, Mrs. Glide) and suggested that the entrance should be changed to economize. Morgan said that if she wanted it that way she should find another architect. She did.

Social connections and past clients as the key to commissions is not a phenomenon particular to women. What is unusual is that it is unlikely that any male would have a roster of clients that was 50 percent institutions for women or women commissioning domestic buildings. This is as revealing about women architects and Morgan as it is about women themselves. These women's institutions and the women clients had a consciousness about their womanhood and about the support of other women that led them to patronize a woman when a qualified woman was available. It was in large part because of this that Morgan was able to execute so many buildings.

Julia Morgan is not well known even among those interested in architecture. There are many reasons for this. She shunned publicity, her work was designed in an eclectic mode which 20th-century historians are just beginning to appreciate, and lastly it is possible that, as much of her work was done for women, it may have been ignored as out of the mainstream.

*Sara Holmes Boutelle, an architectural historian, founded the Julia Morgan Association. Her biography on Morgan is scheduled for publication in the new Encyclopedia of American Architects.*

Study for a country house (?), ca. 1900.



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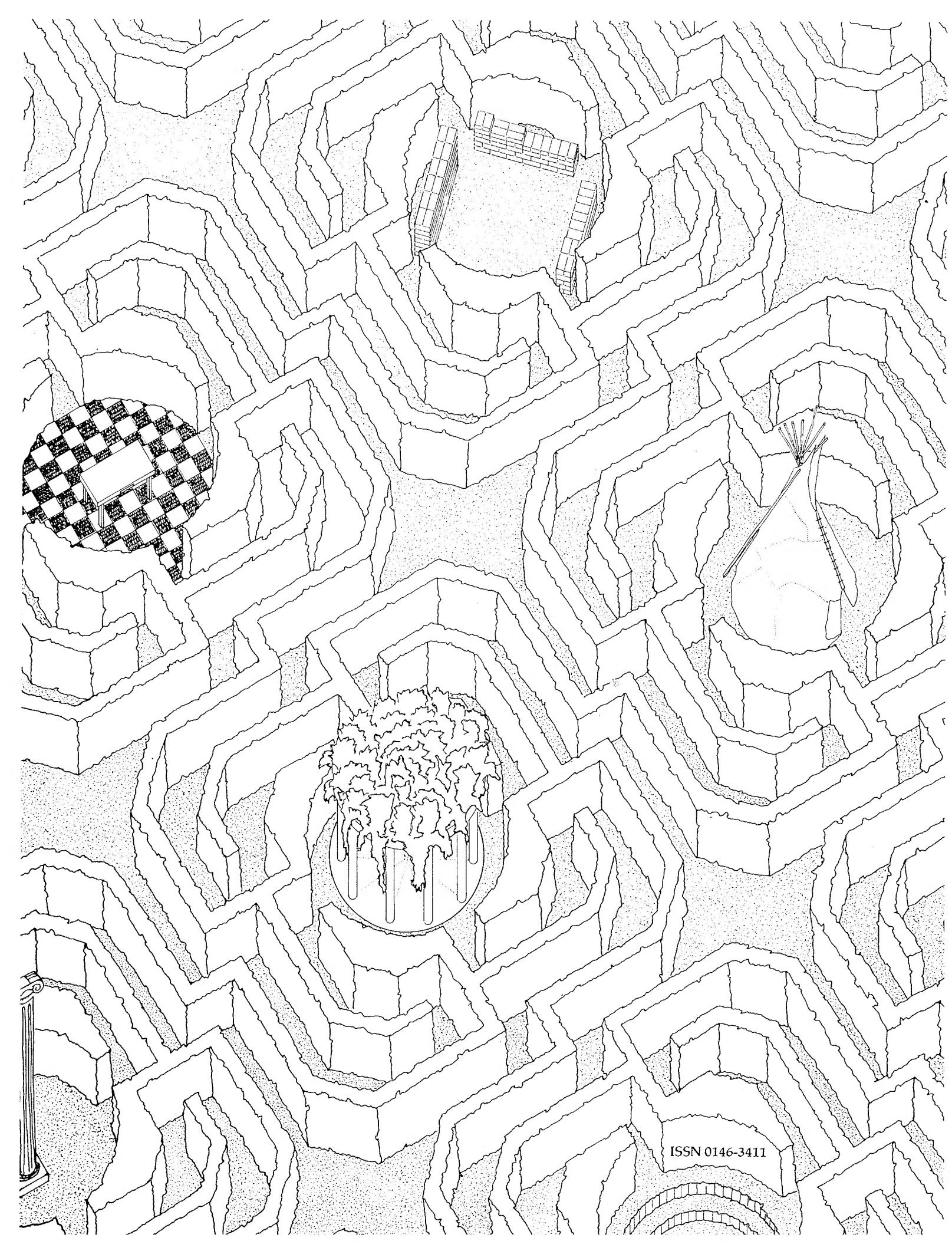
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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS. Each issue of HERESIES has a specific theme and all material submitted should relate to that theme. We welcome outlines and proposals for articles and visual work. Manuscripts (one to five thousand words) should be typewritten, double-spaced, and submitted in duplicate. Visual material should be submitted in the form of a slide, xerox, or photograph. We will not be responsible for original art work. All manuscripts and visual material must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. We do not publish reviews or monographs on contemporary women. We do not commission articles and cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. HERESIES pays a small fee for material that is published in each issue.

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